



Transcript of episode 67 - Gifted and 2e's Place in the Neurodiversity Movement

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:00:31] Hey there and welcome to episode 67. I'm Emily Kircher-Morris. People who are gifted or twice-exceptional are subsets within the field of neurodiversity. On this episode, we are going to be talking to Dr. Mike Postma about how it all fits together, his thoughts about the direction of education and support services, and what we're learning about the why and how of being differently wired. Mike is the Director of Programming for SENG, Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted, and he currently aids in the development of both gifted and twice-exceptional children through his company, Gifted and Thriving. We'll talk to Mike Postma in just a minute.

We're excited about some fairly big changes ahead for this podcast as we continue to grow and increase our focus on the field of neurodiversity. We'll tell you more as we go, but we think you'll like the improvements. We're shooting for the first week of 2021 for the big unveil so keep checking this space for updates and watch our social media accounts for details on the future of the Mind Matters Podcast. Up next...

Mike Postma: [00:02:04] Hello everyone, my name is Dr. Michael Postma. I'm the president and founder of Gifted and Thriving, a small consulting firm that works with families of gifted in twice-exceptional children as well as teachers, and also the former Executive Director of the SENG organization, which stands for Supporting the Emotional Needs of Gifted.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:02:24] Stay where you are.

(break)

We're here with Mike Postma. Mike, thank you for joining us.

Mike Postma: [00:03:35] No problem, glad to be here.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:03:37] So we're going to be talking about neurodiversity and some of the factors that really influence our gifted and twice-exceptional kids. And I like using neurodiversity as a framework as we talk about, about these kids. And I know that you do as well.

What are you noticing is the impact of that neurodiversity movement on gifted education and the psychology and understanding of the social and emotional needs of bright kids.

Mike Postma: [00:04:05] Emily, that is actually the title of two of my courses is "understanding social, emotional development through a lens of narrow diversity." And I think the biggest impact is that we know so much more than we did 10, 15 years ago with the latest research in the last 10 years or so. It's really accelerated. And people are coming

out, uh, folks like dr. Beth Housecamp, who studied almost exclusively the twice-exceptional brain, and then folks like Dr. Nicole Tetreault and others, other neuroscientists that are really focused on the metaphysical development. And that has really informed our practices because we started to understand that asynchronous piece, and the brain science is actually telling us why our kids are asynchronous in terms of development. And why they have limbic delay and why they have what we call hyperbody hypermind that influences everything they do. All their interactions with stimuli throughout their, their every single day, whether it's school, home, or community. And so it's really made a large impact in terms of how we understand where our kids are coming from and why they act the way they act.

And that in turn influences the way you parent them, the way you teach them, the way you speak to them, the way you develop a so-called developmental path for them, from early on all the way through. And for me, teaching them the metacognitive process early on, and understanding their own selves, their own brains, how their brain works, et cetera, et cetera, of course developmentally appropriate, but the earlier we do it, the more they understand themselves and fit in, in a better way, because they get to recognize that they are neurodiverse, and this is what it means. This is how we speak. This is how I socialize. This is how I learn, et cetera, et cetera. So understanding that neurodiverse impact is essential to these kids. And it's also essential for our educators and parents to understand it because it changes the way you look at them, it changes the way you teach them, it changes the way you discipline them. I did a series of teacher trainings in Phoenix and LA and Reno in the spring, early spring, and the impact of teachers understanding neurodiverse development made a very big difference in terms of how they approach those kids in the classroom.

And I think the same can be true for parenting. Uh, understanding what is limbic delay, understanding of what is, why kids, uh, especially 2e kids, might have emotional dysregulation, things like that, um, are so very important to be able to manage that and to teach them the skills they need so that they can become successful adults.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:06:42] Tell me a little bit about some of those things that you're mentioning, the limbic delay, and how are those things influencing these kids?

Mike Postma: [00:06:49] Well, we're, we're seeing, uh, there's, uh, a new study that had come out in 2017 and this had nothing to do with gifted brains. Uh, it was just normal neurodevelopment. And what they had found is that the whole nature versus nurture issue was really about nature. It was really about parenting and about teaching in terms of how we develop anyone's brain. And so they, they termed something called epigenetics, which are actually sensory prints. So sensory prints is how you actually learn as you interact with your environment, so taste, touch, smell, all those different things. And we found that even kids, even before birth, are developing that sensory part of the brain, that sensory arousal meter, so-called arousal meter in a sense, but we're finding with gifted children and 2e children in particular, that their sensory input valve, that arousal meter part, is actually larger.

It's taking in more information at a much more rapid pace, and it's storing that information. And what ends up happening is, because it's overdeveloping, it's intense in terms of its development, so you see with kids with sensory processing disorders, when you're working

with them, they tend to be gifted twice-exceptional because of that sensory input. It's coming at them a million miles an hour, and it's much more rapid and much more dense than their typical peers.

Now you combine that with the limbic system. Now the limbic system is the first thing that develops in the brain, because it's the protective part of the brain, right? It tells you when you're in danger, it tells you when to eat, it tells you when to sleep. It basically protects the body, but it's also responsible for things like emotional regulation, executive functioning and language processing, even.

So you combine that into, which the amygdala, which is the fear mechanism in the brain is part of that limbic system, you combine all that stuff, and with gifted and 2e kids, if this makes any sense, they have also an intense limbic development. So it's developing, but it's being hindered by the epigenetics. It's being hindered by the intense sensory processing.

When that ends up happening is that sensory processing overwhelms the limbic system. And so the kids, when they experience overwhelming stimuli, move into a fight-flight-freeze mentality, which is the limbic system protecting the body. But it happens too early because it's being overwhelmed by all those sensory inputs.

So as they gain knowledge, they are going through life, going through millions and millions and millions of sensory prints that they're developing over time - and those can be negative, they can be neutral, they can be positive - so those kids become asynchronous in development. So that intellectual piece is still there because they have so much information coming in, but it's hindering the limbic development, meaning the, the lack of emotional regulation, the lack of social skills, the lack of things like executive functioning happen because the limbic system is under developed. So you have an intellectual brain, let's say you have an eight year old kid who has an intellectual brain capacity of a 12 year old, and may have the emotional capacity of a five or six year old. So that displays itself and they don't have that same emotional control.

And that is the stuff, when we talk about social emotional development, that we have to teach our kids early on, to compensate for limbic delay. So we've got to teach them social skills. We've got to teach them executive functioning skills. We've got to teach them to regulate their emotions, to recognize when emotions are coming up and to be able to, through simulations through role playing, et cetera, et cetera, teach them how to regulate, and how to manage those situations properly without going off.

The other thing I didn't mention is, with gifted children they tend to have excessive fear memories. So that all that epigenetics and that sensory input that is building knowledge, building memory, in a sense, when they have negative prints, negative triggers, those tend to last for a long, long time. They're very difficult to extinguish. We don't know why, but it just is. So those triggers can happen all the way through life if they're not taught how to regulate those triggers.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:10:50] Right.

Mike Postma: [00:10:50] Now, I'll use a very, very poor example: a young two year old, highly gifted young lady, maybe twice=exceptional, gets stung by a bee, tthat's a negative sensory print. Six years later, she's in a classroom, a bee flies in the window, she might have a sensory reaction to that bee and have a meltdown. The limbic system goes off, she's in protection mode. We have to recognize those triggers. And when it ends up happening, when they have these behavioral dysfunctions in a sense, that are actually neurological responses, you can't treat that as behavior. Because behavior is premeditated, behavior is planned, behavior, um, you know, if I can tell you what I did wrong or why I did something wrong after the fact, you can discipline me for that because I made a choice. But when you have a neurological reaction to something that's overwhelmed your body, your system, your brain, and how do you discipline for that?

And we have so many gifted and twice-exceptional kids is going through having, you know, occasionally having these meltdowns, um, having these episodes, and then they get disciplined on top of that. So you're actually reinforcing a negative punishment for something they can't control.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:11:57] And I would also make the case, perhaps, that the bottom line is a lot of times some of those discipline things, those aren't always the most effective ways to elicit change.

Actually going back to something you said, you mentioned explicit instruction, and I think that that's such a key to helping these kids. And we forget that because they're so bright.

Mike Postma: [00:12:13] You know, it's not even just emotional reactions or, you know, meltdowns. It's also what neuroscientists in this field talk about, hyperbrain hyperbody, is these kids do have some of those overexcitabilities, especially those physical ones. When you're looking at young boys, you know, in first grade and kindergarten in second grade, whatever, where they just need to move. They need to, because they have that hyperbody mentality. And so sometimes that also gets disciplined. And then suddenly parents are getting faced with, Hey, you need to put this child on some medication, when it has nothing to do with the medication in a sense, changing them, you know, kind of doping them down, but it really is about their hyperbody hyperbrain and how they handle that.

So, this is why we encourage things like those bouncy balls and those bouncy stand up things so that they can move a little while they're thinking.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:13:05] I think also, you know, we kind of started with talking about explicit instruction, and that can be as simple as having the conversation.

Mike Postma: [00:13:12] It also can be, um, In a sense, well, let's back up a little bit. Um, to me, the teaching of social emotional foundations and skills is as important as academics for gifted and 2e kids. That's one of my platforms, and part of the reason, you know, being with SENG, I was so strong on that in a sense, because these kids, they can be brilliant, but if they're not catching up in terms of the skills and trainings on those other areas, they may not be very successful in life.

They made be that PhD riding around on a bicycle, delivering pizzas because they haven't adjusted in terms of what life expects of them in terms of social skills, in terms of emotional regulation and that kind of stuff. So, yes, it's essential to explicitly teach those skills, as simple as a conversation, as simple as some role playing and narrowing down situations that have gotten out of hand where, maybe, maybe it's an interaction on a playground where the 2e child gets a little aggressive because their space has been invaded. Right? So you simulate that and you teach better, more positive responses to those types of things. As simple as that. For me, part of the building of metacognition is actually teaching those kids about their own brains. Teaching them about how they function, how they develop, you know, taking that as a basis so they can accept themselves. When they accept themselves, then they can start building on who they are.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:14:32] Yeah. For those of our listeners who maybe aren't familiar, can you explain what you mean by metacognition?

Mike Postma: [00:14:37] Uh, metacognition is, in very simple terms is thinking about thinking. So how I think about the way I think? I broaden that to thinking in terms of developing a scheme of who one is. So it's not only just thinking about thinking, how, the way you think, how, the way you learn. But to me, it's, it's a little bit broader in terms of developing a sense of self, a sense of purpose, a sense of being, and how I fit into different environments, whether it's micro or macro environments, so homeschool, community, et cetera, where do I fit into the world?

And this is so important that a number of years ago, I had a group of sixth graders, I think about 50 of them, that I had responsibility for for about four months, twice a week. And so I was thinking about, what am I going to do with these kids? So we came up with a project called "the responsibility of intellect," and we went through... at the very start of it, we used a FAIR model, which maybe parents aren't familiar with, but it's just a kind of a way to categorize information.

They learned, first of all, about themselves. What does giftedness mean? What does Tuohy mean? What does neurodiversity mean? And then they, when they started recognizing all of these pieces, and we did it in small groups, they did it in their own work, and then they had small group work, et cetera, they're all together, which is a bonus anyway, having 50 gifted kids together is a blessing, for them especially, because they could relate to each other. But as we went through the process, I challenged them and said, okay, you have been in a sense, blessed with this gift. Part of actualization means you have to do something with it. You got to give back in a sense.

And so I challenged them in that way. How are you going to do that? And it wasn't just community service, but these kids came up with some projects that would just blow your mind in terms of the impact they made even internationally, one case. It's a fascinating story about how kids transformed themselves, because they started to learn about themselves, and then went from being unsure of who they were to being confident to the point where they were developing projects that had huge impacts on their own community.

To me, it's super, super important in terms of really letting the kids know about who they are, um, accessing the kind of language they need, in a sense, to be able to express their feelings and emotions, uh, in depth. And then having parents and teachers being able to talk to them about the processes and also answering those deep questions.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:17:00] You've mentioned twice-exceptionality a few times. What are some of the things, as far as the neurological differences and just the overall supports that are needed, how does twice-exceptionality impact all of this that we're, that we're kind of addressing?

Mike Postma: [00:17:15] Actually it adds a burden in a sense. I look at 2e as a, as a gift. I look at it as a, as, as not only a challenge but a gift, because what ends up happening was 2e kids is they can really accentuate their strengths. But they still struggle with the deficits. So those challenges could be as simple as short-term working memory, executive functioning could be processing speed.

I just did a webinar on process speed last Thursday, um, and its impact on gifted, but mostly twice-exceptional kids because the processing speed piece is so important because it's part of how we assess them, part of how we identify them. Um, and that is generally lagging with twice-exceptional children. Um, for a number of reasons, I won't go into the entire spiel, but language development, auditory processing, all of those different things, influence the twice-exceptional piece and make it more difficult in a sense, because they're added, they're given, they're being added a challenge in life, not just blessed with a gift, but they've been added a deficit.

So number one, not only do they experience that isolation piece, but they also don't want to stand out, so they camouflage themselves so they're not getting these accommodations. They're not getting the actual remediation they actually need. And also being challenged, because they miss out on gifted programming, they're missing out on getting all the things they need in terms of intellectual, in terms of breadth and complexity and depth and all those things they really, really thrive on, are being missed as well.

So that's that added burden in a sense for these twice-exceptional kids is, um, that they're living two lives in a sense. And I called that code switching piece where they're back and forth and back and forth in their comfort zone, out of their comfort zone, in their comfort zone, out of the comfort zone, all day long, because most of the time school is not the greatest place for twice-exceptional kids. Number one, cause it would be rarely identified. And number two, we haven't trained our staff in terms of how to work with these kids properly. So that to me, for the 2e part, is a real challenge for us as a community of educators. That we first understand and recognize their differences, recognize that they are brilliant. Most of the two weekends I've ever worked with would be, I would consider highly gifted, but also that they have deficits that need to be accommodated for. And the number one rule there, you use their strengths to accommodate the weaknesses.

But the other thing I see with, with twice-exceptional kids that is a real bonus - these kids are highly creative. They have to be because they're problem solving all day long as they get

through life. And, um, so they tend to be highly creative. And can we use that? Can we use those gifts to help them to really feel like they fit in, to feel like they can be successful?

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:19:58] A theme that I hear a lot, both in what you're saying and just my own experiences that I'm, that I'm kind of thinking about as well, is that a big part of the key for these kids if they have any of those lagging skills, whether they're gifted or twice-exceptional or whatever, is really about from that metacognitive piece, about coaching them through that, thinking about thinking. How do we, how do they take that ownership over that self-regulation? And that that's the key don't you think that allows them like the examples of the students who did these really involved projects and were able to make all of this big impact. It's like, you've got to help them recognize where they can be in control of their life, and give them that freedom and independence to go with it.

Mike Postma: [00:20:44] Absolutely. And Emily, you know as well as anyone, teaching executive functioning skills is so, so, so valuable, so very important. Because not only are they learning life skills, they are building stamina and confidence in themselves. I think that's as important to them because those are the deficits that they really need to work on, but as they work on it, you seen, they build confidence, right?

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:21:07] Exactly.

Mike Postma: [00:21:08] And they build that stamina to get through any situation. They overcome barriers rather than being stuck behind the barriers. And so that's why that is so, so very important.

Yeah. Any final thoughts as we wrap up our conversation? Any advice for parents?

Well, here's, here's the number one thing for me, is empathy towards our learners, our diverse learners, our neurodiverse kids. So one of the things I share when I'm working with teachers especially, I've hired quite a few teachers for different programs, and I tell them the biggest thing I look for in a teacher, in a person working with 2e especially, and gifted children, is that empathy piece. So I would hire someone that had an empathetic understanding of, of gifted development and gifted expression versus someone that had 20 years experience.

Because I could train them on the other pieces. I can train them in terms of the instructional strategies, et cetera, et cetera. I can't train empathy. I can't train understanding. So I would emphasize to both parents and teachers, whoever's out there, if you're working with these kids, you need to build empathy. You need to spend some time in their shoes to really understand where they're coming from, how they get through through their day, because it can be exhausting for them. How they can become fatigued so easily because they're always up against it. And recognizing that, being flexible with that, and being able to, you know, work with their strengths. And when you build that relationship and that true understanding, they will do, you know, they'll jump through hoops of fire for you. So taking that extra time is so, so very important to understand them and to build a positive relationship.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:22:52] Mike, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today.

Mike Postma: [00:22:56] Thank you Emily, for having me and keep up the great work. Thank you.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:23:07] Quirky differently-wired, neurodivergent. Our kids experience the world in a way that is a bit outside the norm, but ultimately whatever we call it, or if we don't label it at all, our kids already know. They know that they're different younger than we realize, even if they don't have the words to explain how they feel. Giving kids the key to self awareness is the first step to helping them grow into independent, successful people.

From self-awareness grows the ability to self-advocate and self-regulate. Metacognition, thinking about thinking, is just another way to talk about self awareness. Let's give kids the information about how they learn and how their brains work.

I hear parents worry about giving their child an excuse for poor behavior if they're explicit about what those struggles might be. And I understand that fear. But ultimately, information is power, and how we frame those discussions will guide them. There's nothing that makes me feel more helpless than being uncertain and confused. And our kids are already that way until we talk to them about their neurological wiring, and about the strengths and struggles that can go along with it.

When we do this, we set the stage for them to grow into healthy self-reliant young people who are empowered to make the changes they need to be successful in their lives. I'm Emily Kircher-Morris. I'll see you next time on Mind Matters.

(music)

Dave Morris: [00:24:46] Big thanks to Michael Postma. If you visit our episode page at www.MindMattersPodcast.com you can find more information about him and a link to his book, *The Inconvenient Student: Critical Issues in the Identification and Education of Twice-Exceptional Students*. Our thanks also to our social media friends who have shared our page with their friends. We appreciate your help in growing our audience. Follow us, www.facebook.com/mindmatters, and [@MindMattersPod](https://twitter.com/MindMattersPod) on Twitter. For Emily, I'm Dave Morris, Mind Matters Executive Producer and Emily's personal Uber. Thanks for listening. Stay safe, stay healthy. We'll see you next time.

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