

Part of a Continuing Series about 2e-Friendly Schools

Profile of Reid Day School

By J. Mark Bade

Reid Day School (RDS) is a nascent place of refuge and learning for twice-exceptional students in grades 1-6 who live in Orange County, California. Founded by (but not named after) Lisa Reid, the first-year school has been featured twice by major news outlets — in September at the website of *Psychology Today*, and then in December by the *Orange County Register*.

The reporter for the *Register* had not heard of twice-exceptionality, but crafted an engaging, empathetic article that should help general readers understand what it's like to be a twice-exceptional student.

On the other hand, the author of the second piece, psychologist Dan Peters, is very familiar with twice-exceptionality — both through his practice, Summit Center, as readers of *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter* are aware, and through unique, collaborative relationships with schools like Reid Day School.

One response Dan received to his article was, “Why aren’t there more schools like this?” Indeed, why not? Based on the experience of Lisa Reid, founder of RDS, *here’s why not...*

First: Founding Such a School Requires Understanding of and Empathy toward 2e Young People.

“I didn’t ‘get’ school,” says Lisa Reid. “I actually had to repeat my sophomore year in high school and did so in order to transfer to a small private boarding school,” where she found more social and academic satisfaction. College, she says, was difficult, and it

wasn’t until later in life that she discovered the amount of energy that it takes her to read, write, and engage in most typical activities is more than it should be, for various reasons familiar to those in the 2e community. “Had it not been for a great turn of luck with my [private] high school and a lot of very understanding people along the way, I would likely be in a very different place.”

Lisa graduated from college with a degree in biology, hoping to become a wildlife biologist. But an aversion to statistics — “the biggest part of wildlife bio,” she says — steered her to teaching, where she thought she’d be able to effect change.

“Once I started teaching, I fell in love with it,” she says, and went on to teach an accelerated school program. But she noticed something. “Over many years, I saw a trend with underachievement and behavior challenges with what I could tell were my brightest kids. I was perplexed by this and ended up completing a master’s thesis on underachieving gifted students.” She later completed a doctorate in curriculum and instruction, with a secondary emphasis on educational psychology. Her dissertation was on self-regulation.

Part of Lisa’s time as a teacher was at Bridges Academy, in Studio City, California. “It was not until I arrived at Bridges,” she says, “that I heard the term ‘twice exceptional’ and gained a completely new understanding.” Eventually the long commute from Orange County to Studio City led her to leave Bridges, but she still keeps in close touch with the community there.

Second: You Must Recognize the Importance of the Social-Emotional Piece.

“I’ve always respected the kids who demonstrated brilliance but didn’t fit in the box,” says Lisa. “My heart broke for them when they were always in trouble or felt like failures as a result of their seeming laziness, inability, or refusal to do class work.” When teachers and parents respect the inner dignity of those students and support them appropriately, she believes, those students can realize



School founder Lisa Reid exhibiting at SENG in 2015

Profile of Reid Day School, continued

their full potential. “I fear for the trajectory of their lives when they are misunderstood and haven’t developed a strong sense of self.”

Working at Bridges, of course, showed Lisa the importance of addressing the social-emotional side of struggling students. “Bridges Academy was the first place I’d worked where I felt as though the administration and teachers truly had what was best for the social-emotional needs of the individual students at heart.”

Lisa also saw the child of a close relative go through a difficult educational experience, one compounded by a lack of communication and understanding between professionals providing services for the family and the child’s school. Adding to the difficulty was the family’s heavy after-school commitment to address the child’s social-emotional issues.

Lisa’s epiphany was that school could integrate academics and social-emotional counseling (personal development) by collaborating with the appropriate professionals at school. That would help teachers and professionals best understand the whole child, and also lessen the after-school burden on the students and their families.

“My experience at Bridges helped me to see that it was possible to make student social-emotional needs a priority, and that gave me a totally new and different perspective toward education and giftedness.” The school program design at RDS integrates her personal experience along with what she learned at Bridges. Another influence Lisa acknowledges is Marcy Dann, an educational therapist who worked with Bridges students.

Third: You Have to Be Able to Envision the Solution.

Lisa Reid realized that there was a huge need for an Orange County school devoted to twice-exceptional children, so she decided to open one. Although she’d thought about starting a school many times, she says that she did not become motivated to actually pursue the idea until she met psychologist Dan Peters. “I realized that in order for my idea to work, it would require the involvement of someone who had expertise in the area of giftedness and psychology, who cared very much about helping children have successful school experiences, who is relatable and interacts with families with understanding and respect, and who is unwavering in his commitment and dedication to making a difference in the field.”

That’s quite a qualifications list, but Lisa’s ideas impressed Dan. “Lisa had the wisdom to integrate counseling, assessment, and educational therapy services into the fabric of the school.” Summit center provides counseling and assessment, and informs the educational therapy services provided by RDS. Dan saw the arrangement as “an awesome collaboration opportunity” because Summit Center has expertise in serving the same population as RDS — twice-exceptional children.

Integrating professional services into a school day has advantages. For one, the professionals can observe and intervene in real time, when situations occur, and then follow up in individual counseling appointments to both work on the skills needed and increase understanding about the challenging situations. Dan says that this first advantage is most applicable to counseling services. But on-site assessment

Profile in Brief

Students: Six full time, two hybrid (combining RDS and homeschooling) and 15 using educational therapy services

Grades: 1-6

Student teacher ratio: Not above 6:1 in content-area classes. (Larger groups are allowed for enrichments and PE.)

Typical school day:

- Content area courses in the morning
- Skills rotation twice a week with 1:1 learning support and counseling
- PE four or five days a week (yoga, sports, strength and fitness, free play, hiking)
- Off-site field trips twice a month
- Daily enrichment including art, music, passion project (interest driven), coding, theater, social thinking
- Advisory (daily keyboarding and “homework”). No assigned homework for after school and no assigned grades.

Facilities: Three classrooms, library, learning center, counseling office, Summit Center assessment office, collaborative teacher work space, and conference room for events. Close to off-site enrichments such as a music conservatory, a trampoline park, and Back Bay (Newport Bay Nature Preserve and Ecological Reserve).

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and collaboration have advantages as well. The evaluator then understands the types of questions and information needed to best interpret a student's behavior and make an effective individualized plan.

Lisa believes that a key differentiator of RDS is the school's ability to develop tailored learning plans with academic interventions. These plans and interventions support students either in overcoming challenges or in developing learning strategies to address those challenges, allowing them to become more independent as learners. "Our relationship with Summit allows us to integrate their expertise and to design learning plans with them according to the students' diverse learning profiles."

Would such an arrangement be feasible for any private school? Dan thinks so. "I believe any private school could contract with allied professionals to provide counseling and assessment services."

Fourth: You Need to Turn the Vision into Reality with People and Resources.

Even with a great concept and the right collaborator in Summit Center, there are still plenty of challenges in launching a school such as RDS. One, of course, is money. This is where the school's namesake comes in. Lisa explains, "I was able to fund the launch with money left to me by my father, Martin Reid, for whom the school is named."

Then, of course, an aspiring head of school for the twice exceptional needs teachers — very exceptional teachers. The teachers at RDS are certified by the state of California, and they have graduate degrees



Take it apart!

along with content-area expertise and special education experience. Lisa and one other teacher are educational therapists with specific training in educational psychology and academic interventions.

"The teachers are very dedicated. They are there because they care very much about reaching students with atypical learning profiles and helping them to become confident, independent, successful, and happy," says Lisa. "They bring a wealth of knowledge, compassion, and understanding to the underlying difficulties that often get in a student's way, and they know how to best support our students."

As it turns out, Lisa Hancock, who spent time interning at Bridges, lives in Orange County and has been working with Dan Peters. She works with RDS as the school counselor. She has also, says the RDS founder, played an essential role in school programming and as a vital support resource for students, staff, and families. Reid notes that the integration of the psychological piece and curriculum/instruction piece is really what makes RDS a special and effective program.

Academics at RDS include many STEM activities, which Reid says integrate nicely with science content. Teachers capitalize on the students' interests. For example, a section on technology fit well with a parent's presentation of the prototype of his recent invention. Students also created their own inventions with motors and circuits, and they had "Take-Apart Tuesday" to explore the makeup of electronic devices.

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Profile of Reid Day School, continued

Language arts and social thinking content were tied to the development of a student newsletter and plans for a yearbook, as well as to publishing short stories on topics of interest to the students. Also interest-driven were the scripts students wrote for short stop-motion films they produced.

“We also let their interests drive our enrichment and field trip options,” says Lisa. The school uses technology such as teaching apps, and assistive tech such as Snap & Read, Co:Writer, and voice-to-text so that all students can access or express content regardless of their challenges. In addition, students are always allowed to move while they learn.



Not your mother's PE

Lisa also notes how every aspect of the school day is designed to integrate attention to both academic needs and social-emotional needs. For teachers, this means understanding what the student needs emotionally in order to be available for learning. If there's an issue preventing participation in class, students may excuse themselves to problem-solve independently or with staff. For especially challenging situations, a counselor is available. Each student checks in with the counselor on a regular basis.

Summit Center team members become involved with school staff during lesson development and assessment of student progress. Educational therapists work with students on improving executive functioning, study skills, learning strategies, and assessment preparation. Students also participate in a research-based physical education curriculum each day.

Fifth: You Have to “Sell” the School.

If you build it, will they come? Or finance it?

Lisa Reid has discovered that it takes time to build relationships and trust before people enroll their children. “Many families have tried so many different programs and ‘solutions’ that they have a hard time believing that anyone understands and can help. So they take the time that they need to consider us.” Other families are just finding out about RDS. Still others, according to Lisa, are making sure that the school is going to make it. “I am very excited to be able to report that we are,” she states.

With a school like RDS, tuition may not completely support the school's operations. Parents in the 2e community know firsthand about the expenses of



Art!

assessment, counseling, tutoring, enrichment, and the other accoutrements of twice-exceptionality. So outside sources of funding can be important. But Lisa has been surprised at how difficult it is to obtain loans or grants. She says those might not be available to non-profits until they demonstrate sustainability for at least a year or two. “They don't offer support until you almost don't need it anymore, which is backward, because the money is needed early on.”



Profile of Reid Day School, concluded

So fundraising is part of launching a new school. “It has been very humbling to have to reach out to people directly and tell them that we need support, but it has also been heartwarming to see that there are a lot of people who genuinely care about seeing change happen and want to help,” says Lisa. Several major donors have helped ensure a strong finish for the school’s first year. (The non-profit school has on its website ways for donors to contribute to the support of students and the school’s mission: www.reidday.org/get-involved.html.)

Community outreach is also part of “selling” a new school. RDS offers parent education sessions every month and they are well attended. Dan Peters, James Webb, Sharon Duncan, and Joanna Haase have presented at the school.

The gifted program in Orange County schools has invited Reid staff members to attend their meetings. Local private and public school districts invite RDS staff to present to their teachers. And Lisa says, “We have really enjoyed the 2e social community that is growing here through our meet-up group and continuing education events.” As professionals and educators in Orange County become aware of RDS and what it can offer to twice-exceptional students, they provide referrals and encouragement for the school.

That’s Why There Aren’t More Schools Like RDS

In spite of a smattering of schools across the country that do cater to twice-exceptional students, chances are most parents don’t have one available to them, especially one that integrates academics and



Holiday time at RDS

All photos except on page 1 courtesy of Reid Day School

personal development. “Although many schools have counselors and psychologists,” says Lisa Reid, “I do not know of any grade 1-6 twice-exceptional schools that have those professionals intricately involved with the development and oversight of progress of students with their learning plans — especially on-site and in collaboration with the teaching staff.”

Dan Peters isn’t sure whether the kind of arrangement between Summit Center and RDS will become more common; but he does say, “I have seen an increase in private and independent schools hiring

learning specialists due to the increased complexity of students seeking non-public schools.”

For school founders like Lisa Reid, however, that question is moot. She’s committed. “We haven’t strayed from our vision or our mission, and I think that has really united our community. Our families had to take that initial leap of faith, and the first few months involved a learning curve with them, our students, and our team members.”

To her, the daily successes experienced by students, staff, and families are exciting, reminding everyone the journey they’re all on with this new school is worth it. “We are really proud of our students and thrilled to see how much they have grown in such a short time. We are happy to have found our ‘groove.’” 📷

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