

## Part of a Continuing Series about 2e-Friendly Schools

# Profile of The Lang School

By J. Mark Bade

*A visitor at The Lang School is talking to a group of parents who have students enrolled at Lang. One dad calls his son “typical 2e,” a child who could read newspapers at age 4, was ahead in every subject, and who had an incredible memory but poor executive functioning. But his challenges left him with poor self-esteem; and after being kicked out of one school, the family was having a hard time finding another. After visiting Lang for two days and giving it “100 percent,” the son was enrolled. He transformed from “a bad kid” to a model student with enhanced self-esteem.*

*“Nothing existed here before this school,” says the dad. “I don’t know how we would have gotten by.”*

Like many heads of 2e-friendly schools, Lang School founder Micaela Bracamonte was motivated by self-interest. Not only is she the mother of two twice-exceptional boys, she also describes herself (and her husband) as having been “those kids.” So in 2010 she started The Lang School in Manhattan, named after Micaela’s inspirational tenth-grade teacher, to serve twice-exceptional children. At first enrolling 13 students in grades 1-6, Lang is now a K-12 school in an attractive third-floor space at 11 Broadway in lower Manhattan. Of the 50 students, 7 are girls.

Lang currently has five class groupings, K-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, and 8-10. These will change as current students advance or for other considerations.

In addition to each classroom, the school has alcoves (“break rooms”) where students may go for

stress relief or to engage in independent activities as part of their “reward time.” The facilities include a lab that’s heavily used for project-based learning. During our visit, one student was working on an EEG-like “neuralware” device to help students with attention issues become aware of when their mind is wandering during class. Another student, a young woman, was building a wooden shoe last as part of her “indie studies” project to create a comfortable high-heeled shoe.

Also inside the school are a multi-purpose room (for occupational therapy, drama performances, etc.) and offices for staff, plus a graffiti wall where students may express their thoughts.



A Lang School classroom

### Educational Approach

Micaela Bracamonte says that The Lang School emphasizes evidence-based instruction. “There’s a lot of stuff out there for kids on the spectrum, for kids with ADHD, for kids with all kinds of classroom-based challenges, that is not research-based,” she says. “I have no interest in those interventions during school hours. I’m not leaving anything to chance here.”

In terms of her staff, she says, “We bring in very flexibly-minded, passionate people and we train them in what we’re doing and why. We’re pulling together empirically-supported practices from gifted education, special education, positive psychology, and behavioral sciences, and we’re seeing what works with our kids. And what works for one student will not necessarily work for another.”

Bracamonte says that instructional and therapeutic interventions are integrated into regular classroom work as much as possible and may also be offered in the form of one-on-one work, for example an hour a week with a literacy specialist. Advice from specialists is incorporated into a child’s classroom work, and the specialists monitor the classrooms to ensure that teachers are supporting the areas in which a student might be challenged or need customized acceleration.



Micaela Bracamonte

## Profile of the Lang School, continued

For each student, the staff maintains a binder that includes the individual's strengths, weaknesses, interventions, and growth goals. The binder is part of a case management system in which doctoral-level psychologists, along with the complete team of therapeutic professionals and teaching staff, review each child's entire program throughout the school year.

Likewise, psychological interventions are also scientifically based. "Our social-emotional and behavioral supports are not based on a combination of intuition and good intentions," says Bracamonte. For example, she says, the psychologist who consults on behavior plans for the school worked on the well-known Multimodal Treatment Study of ADHD.



The "graffiti wall"

Bracamonte's background is in journalism. On starting a school, she says, "I feel that if you're a resourceful, committed, reasonably intelligent, reasonably well-educated person, you can set your mind to anything and get it done." She calls herself a natively skeptical, fact-driven, passionate advocate for twice-exceptional people.

### A Typical Day

The school day at Lang starts at 8:45. This being Manhattan, students arrive by car, bus, and subway.

Each student's classroom is equipped with a SMART Board, an interactive whiteboard. All students are assigned an iPad of their own. Of the two teachers a student will encounter in his or her homeroom class, both are master's-level special educators and at least one has training in gifted education, according to the school.

The school uses a variety of methodologies to teach literacy, and a hybrid of Singapore Math and Math Circle to teach math. According to the school, science, history, and social studies classes are interdisciplinary, with in-class work supplemented by fieldtrips and visits by field experts.

Students receive a daily recess break, and movement (and sensory) breaks are available during the day. Lunchtime finds students eating in their classrooms or in nearby Battery Park. Also during the school day, students might, if prescribed, be involved in occupational therapy, speech therapy, or counseling.

Spanish classes, physical education classes (karate and yoga), and social development groups are



"Reward time" in one of the alcoves

offered twice a week. Other classes are offered once per week: maker-oriented art/creative lab, engineering (think "shop" with an entrepreneurial bent), drama, software engineering, music, study/organizational skills, and handwriting/keyboarding. On Friday afternoons all students get a chance to explore their own interests through a talent development program or independent study. The school day ends at 3:30.



## Profile of the Lang School, continued

### Parental Involvement

Bracamonte expects parents to be involved with the school. “Parents are the real powerhouses of the 2e education movement,” she says. “I’d like to see more of us become education professionals and more of us start schools. We are the ones who understand our children’s promise and challenges better than anyone, especially as those little apples don’t fall far from these big trees. We are, by and large, 2e ourselves. I think that’s what’s missing most from programs for 2e students: first-hand knowledge of what it’s like to be a twice-exceptional learner — both how hard that is and how liberating that is.”

The school hosts morning coffees and evening training sessions for parents. “What parents of 2e children need to get comfortable with is embracing their child’s strengths and challenges, and address-

ing both,” she says. If a child is acting out because of frustration caused by ADHD and working memory challenges, then the right research-based interventions that are consistent with the family’s values should help the student succeed at Lang.

The Lang School therapeutic team expects parents of prospective students to be transparent and collaborative when it comes to interventions. “If a parent comes to us and says they think the right school setting is a stand-alone treatment for their child’s ADHD, that’s a red flag for our admissions team. There is no one answer to each child’s and family’s complex set of challenges. Parents need to step up to the plate, too.”

The school does not accept or retain students who exhibit physical or emotional aggression toward others or themselves.

The school is supported by an advisory board that includes Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.; Scott Barry Kaufman, Ph.D.; Peter Pramataris, Ph.D.; and Rena F. Subotnik, Ph.D.

*The mother of a 13-year-old student in his first year at Lang related her family’s story. After public school and Montessori school had stopped working for her son, the family visited schools serving kids with LDs all over New York but found none that fit. Finally she attended an open house at Lang, afterward calling her husband: “I think this is it.” Last Thanksgiving at dinner the young man raised his hand and said to the gathered family, “I’m thankful for my new school.”* 



In the lab

### Profile in Brief

**Number of students:** 43 boys, 7 girls

**Classes:** K-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-10

**Average class size:** 10

**Maximum class size:** 12

**Teachers per class:** 1-2

**Founded:** 2010

**Tuition:** \$58,075 (2016-17 school year)

**More information:** <http://thelangscool.org>

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March/April, 2016, issue of  
*2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter*.  
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