

香 港 資 優 教 育 學 院
The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education
Information Sheet

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY GIFTED STUDENTS?

Broadly speaking, the identification of gifted students falls into two camps:

1. **The IQ Testing Approach** – This is where students, often at quite an early age, are tested for what we call “*general intelligence*” (“g”) in the belief that intelligence traits are already defined at this early age and that general intelligence is a valid measure of the ability of a child to understand complex reality. In fact, some researchers feel that very young children should not be tested because such tests can lack validity below that age of 6-7 years. Moreover, this unitary approach to measuring intelligence has been overtaken by broader and some would say more meaningful understandings of the nature of intelligence. This approach to identification was common up to the 1980s.
2. **The Broad Approach** recognizes that the IQ method alone misses so many gifted children because we now have a better understanding of what constitutes “giftedness”. Consequently, the procedures for identification are more comprehensive; some still use IQ test results but the field of evidence covers more observed behaviours and more of the evidence call fall into the “soft” category.

Each of these approaches reflects the changes in thinking towards our understanding of giftedness and of intelligence in the past few decades. There are some who argue that “intelligence” is too complex to be defined by a single statistical measure and that any test will define intelligence according to what that test measures.

The concept of intelligence has, over the past 25 years, been given broader and more differentiated meanings such as with the recognition of specific and non-traditional talent areas and the popularising of concepts of “emotional intelligence” (EQ) and “multiple intelligences” (MIs). This is a positive movement away from the earlier unitary view of intelligence and giftedness - where a gifted child was considered to have superior aptitudes in all fields of intellectual endeavour. Multi-faceted definitions of giftedness now are common, which include children with exceptional capacity in one or more broad areas of knowledge or skill. Some skill areas present difficult measurement issues, particularly of capacity rather than achievement, but within this constraint the top 2-10% of the population in one of the domains or fields are generally regarded as gifted.

Moreover potential does not always show in achievements. There can be many impediments that block or misdirect the development of the ability. Gagne (1995) has developed this understanding of the role of the child's motivation and of the factors in the child's environment (family, school, peers, etc) that may hinder (or facilitate) the child's ability being realised into achievements. Not all gifted children are achievers.

With this lack of consensus on intelligence and giftedness it is hardly surprising that the identification of gifted children is not simple. Even teachers are not typically good at identifying gifted children, although research suggests that, with training in gifted education, teachers can significantly improve their record at identification. Parents can be powerful advocates for their children because they see their children's achievements outside of the school context and for many more hours than a teacher. It is the case, after all, that children spend about 83% of their waking hours **outside** of school. It is also the case, however, that the naturally strong emotional ties that come with parenthood can in some cases prejudice the parent in to believing what their child can do in the face of contrary

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evidence. The important point to remember is that there is no foolproof way of saying that a child is gifted though we can mitigate against missing a gifted child by adopting methods that take into account a broad range of evidence.

Consequently a multi-faceted (or portfolio) approach to identification is now thought to be the most effective way. It is not simply a matter of IQ testing, though that can play a role, but of using multiple criteria from a variety of sources. By using a number of sources and carefully observing a gifted child's behaviour it is possible to triangulate responses and arrive at a consensus for identification. A school, looking particularly for academic giftedness, might use all of the following:

- **teacher nominations using a behavioural checklist.** The accuracy of these increases with pre- and inservice training in gifted education
- **parent nominations** via a parent questionnaire on the child's characteristics, interests and home achievements at time of enrolment, and an openness throughout the student's time at the school for the parent to raise concerns and highlight any discrepancies between home and school performance
- **peer nominations** with questions such as "who would you turn to with such and such a problem?"
- **self nominations** can often discover well hidden talents provided specific programs are advertised and open to the whole school
- **standardised tests**, and
- **IQ testing** provided the appropriate test is used (e.g. tests which are designed to minimise culture or language bias, e.g. Ravens).

Identification by parents is often accurate, despite the myth that parents always think their children are bright. Parents are in the best position to know the child and its inner strivings, and their major difficulties are often not having a ready comparison (particularly in the case of only or eldest children), and of overcoming, when appropriate, the desire not to appear to be "pushy".

These links below lead to sample nomination forms that can be used by schools with the various nominating groups. It is important to remember that the value of this exercise lies in both including groups who know something about the child as well as the triangulation process to avoid missing those who, for whatever reason, are hiding their gifts and talents.

[Teacher Observation of Special Strengths Based on M.I. Theory](#)

[Checklist for Parents of Gifted Students](#)

[Parent Nomination in Early Years \(0-5\)](#)

[Checklist for Peer Identification of Gifted Students](#)

[GE Student Observation Form](#)

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