



Video 3 Identification of Gifted Children

In this video I discuss how and why we should identify gifted students.

Why identify Gifted Children?

After a new cohort of students present themselves in class it can take a while before we as teachers come to know each individual child and how they respond to the expectations we set.

In a mixed ability classroom, and in the absence of a pre-prepared program of differentiation teachers tend to teach to the middle ability. This tends to stretch slightly weaker students, match the ability of average students but completely fails to challenge academically stronger children. While the NCCA recognizes that good teaching for gifted children is good teaching for all children, this is not sufficient. The level at which a lesson is pitched is important.

So in a mixed ability environment the educational needs of gifted children often neglected. This results in a negative experience of school. Gifted students will often complain of being bored more than is reasonable. The younger is the child, the greater the likelihood of disruptive behavior as a result of this boredom.

Traditionally the role of the teacher in the classroom was to deliver the curriculum. Cognizance of the needs of children were very much secondary. The advent of child-centred education brought with it recognition that children have a right to an appropriate education. This includes gifted the children. However the absence of specific teacher training at initial teacher education level often means that at best, teachers have no knowledge of gifted education matters and at worst a heap of misconceptions about giftedness.

Just as important as an appropriate educational provision within a school, all children need an appropriate social experience of school. Because gifted children tend to have different interests to other children, they often find it very difficult to find a peer group in school. This can lead to gifted children being isolated and often bullied in school. In a worst-case scenario this can lead to depression in gifted children.

In a school of 1000 students it is possible that 30 or so will be gifted. These children could be dispersed across classes and years and may have a few opportunities to meet each other. Consequently it's important that the school can offer opportunities for gifted children to find their tribe.

Notwithstanding these points it's important to identify gifted children and provide for their educational needs because it is ethically the good thing to do.

A school cannot claim to be truly inclusive if excludes anyone who is qualitatively different from the norm. While school are very busy places and it seems every day the number of pressures increase, we cannot ignore one section of the school community simply because it was convenient to do so. Schools have a duty of care towards all of their students. The effects of how we exercise this duty of care extend well into the adult life of the children we teach. Consequently we have an ethical responsibility to ensure we do not exclude students for want of looking.

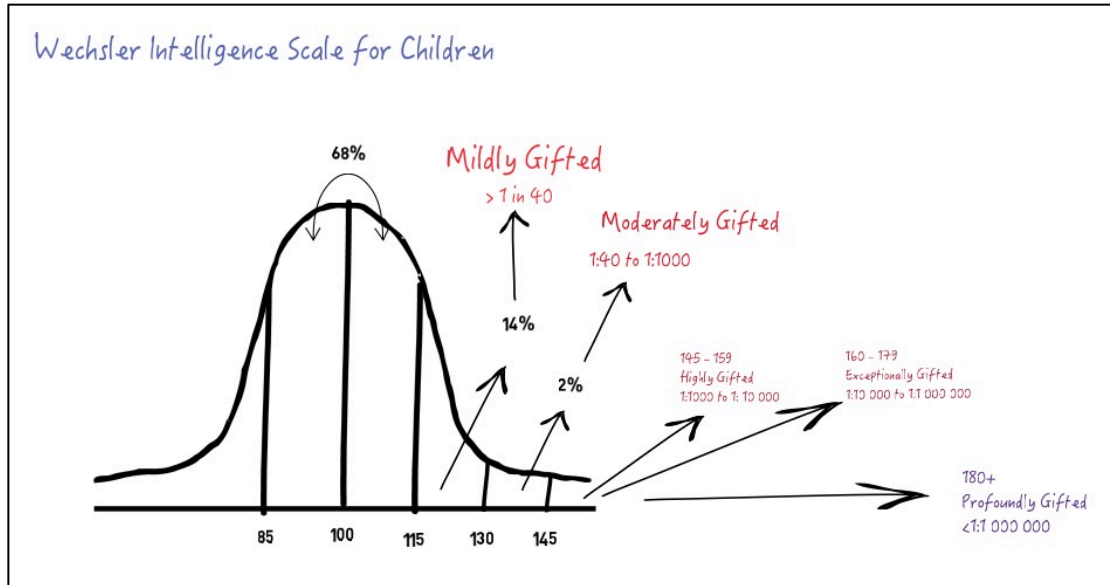
How to identify gifted students

There are several ways to identify gifted students but we can narrow this down into two broad approaches; objective approaches based on tests such as IQ tests; and subjective measures such as observation by parents, peers and teachers.

The Wechsler intelligence Scale (WISC IV) is a norm-referenced IQ test. It doesn't provide an absolute measure of intelligence. Instead, it ranks individual against the sample used to construct the test. Because it is a ranked measure a person with an IQ of 160 is not twice as smart as an individual with an IQ of 80.

The WISC IV test produces a score in which the mean or average IQ is 100. 68% of the population has an IQ plus and minus one standard deviation of the mean. This means the 68% of the population has an IQ between 85 and 115. Schools on average cater best for these students.

Approximately 14% have an IQ between 115 and 130. This group is referred to as mildly gifted. 2% of people have an IQ between 130 and 145. This group is moderately gifted. The WISC has a ceiling or maximum measure of 160. So a number of years ago a set of extended norms were produced in conjunction with the National Association for Gifted Children in the United States which allowed for IQ assessments up to 210.



Below an IQ of 85, children need specialist intervention in school or in some cases, access to a special school to achieve. It sounds counter-intuitive but the further above an IQ of 130, the greater the need for specialist intervention to ensure gifted children receive an appropriate education.

While there is much debate about the negative aspects of IQ test they are amongst the most studied and tested measures of psychological characteristics. Most of the debate about IQ focuses on the measures reported by the IQ test rather than on the environmental causes for the reported measures.

That said, Robert Sternberg affirms that IQ predicts school performance moderately well and that IQ correlates very well with life performance predicting health, longevity and job success.

Sternberg, R.J., Jarvin, L., & Grigorenko, E. L., (2011) Explorations in Giftedness, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

John Hattie states that IQ predicts performance in job training and that it is among the best predictors of earnings.

Hattie, J. & Fletcher, R. B., (2011) Intelligence and Intelligence Testing, Routledge, New York.

Another test of IQ is Raven's Progressive Matrices. This test consists of an image of the pattern in which a piece is missing. The test taker has to decide which jigsaw piece correctly completes the pattern.

Raven's Progressive Matrices does not suffer from the same environmental issues as the Wechsler intelligence Scale and therefore it is a much more reliable measure of IQ, especially for individuals with strong visual-spatial

abilities. However, Raven's Progressive Matrices also suffers from ceiling effects and tops out at an IQ of 135 and consequently cannot be used to identify exceptionally or profoundly gifted individuals.

One way of addressing the ceiling effects of IQ tests is use of above-level tests such as scholastic achievement tests. SATs are used by the Centre for Talented Youth Ireland (CTYI). College entry SATs designed for 18-year-old students are administered to students aged 12 to 16 to determine their qualification for entry to CTYI's courses. Any 12 to 16 year old student scoring in the 95th percentile in such a SAT is obviously gifted.

Subjective means of identification include observation by parents, teachers and peers. Parent observations are particularly accurate when compared to other siblings. Teacher observations are powerful tool in identifying children who are gifted not just in one domain but children who may be gifted in different domains.

Students are also very accurate in their identification of gifted students. Of course a teacher would not ask this question directly in class but might instead provide students with a questionnaire asking 'who is the funniest student' or 'which student would you ask first for help with school work?'.

The links below will provide you with a series of observations forms for use in several subjects or to share with colleagues. The lists are not exhaustive and should not be used on their own but rather in conjunction with other identification procedures. There is a general checklist for primary school, a general checklist for secondary schools and an excel file with checklists for several subjects. Some of these have been adapted from NCCA Guidelines for Teachers of Exceptionally Able Students and include reference to my own experience teaching gifted children.

Should I tell a child or their parent that they are gifted?

There is some debate over whether or not a child should be told they gifted. In the absence of an IQ test, there are some obvious and very clear reasons why one should not do so. Not least because of the possibility of being wrong. Different children will handle the news they are gifted in different ways. Research by Carol Dweck suggests that children who are praised as being smart do not perform as well as children are praised for the effort they make.

Dweck, C. S., (2006) *Mindset – The New Psychology of Success*, Ballantine Books, New York.

However there are times when telling a child they are gifted can help them help them come to an understanding of their experiences in school. This is particularly important where child has been diagnosed with depression which results from their experiences of being gifted. Being told they gifted is a way in which they can come to understanding that there is nothing wrong with them, it's just that there are different.

In America, where some states and school districts have funding specifically for gifted children or where there are dedicated gifted schools, it is impossible to avoid telling a child who has sat an entrance exam and passed that they are gifted.

What is important is that every child needs and deserves every encouragement they can get in life. However it is important that gifted children realize that a gifted assessment does not mean they need no longer make an effort. This is important because gifted students will sometimes avoid making an effort in order to avoid failing. The risk of failing becomes equated with not being gifted after all. Consequently the decision whether or not to tell a student they are gifted should be one for parents to make in the knowledge that the parents may have to adapt their parenting style as a consequence.

Twice-Exceptional Students

There is one additional group of gifted children which require particular intervention from teachers. Twice exceptional students are students who are gifted but who also have a learning disability. For example, a child may be gifted and also dyslexic. In that situation the child's giftedness can mask the dyslexia. Alternatively a teacher may see the dyslexia and not see the giftedness.

A teacher might reflect on this when they consider their personal experience of a student's excellent performance in class but apparently poor homework or assignment effort. Typical school report comments such as 'must work harder' suggests that the teacher believes a child has more ability than their work displays. Consequently the question must be why did the student not produce work which is commensurate with their perceived ability.

Of particular concern are gifted students who are also on the autistic spectrum. These students present particular challenges and require specific intervention to help them make the most of their strengths.

Noting similarities between gifted behaviours and those of ADHD and Asperger's syndrome, a psychologist in the United States, Dr. James Webb, expresses concern about the misdiagnosis of children who are gifted. It's important that any psychological assessment considers gifted traits so they are not mistaken for another condition. All things held constant, this is particularly important where a child's in-school behaviour prompts a call for an assessment.

In the absence of IQ tests and observational data, some schools have relied on school examination data to identify gifted children. While this can be a useful in identifying gifted children it is important that is not relied on too heavily. Some gifted children, in particular those who are twice exceptional, may perform very poorly on written tests. In addition, it is the high achievers rather than the gifted who are more likely to perform well in school tests.

Consequently teacher and parent observation is a very important tool in accurately identifying gifted children.

In summary, any assessment of whether a child is gifted should take account of several sources of data and should not rely on one measure. IQ tests are important, but so too are parent and teacher observation.

In the next video, we will look at characteristics of gifted children to get a better understanding of them.

References

Dweck, C. S., (2006) *Mindset – The New Psychology of Success*, Ballantine Books, New York.

Hattie, J. & Fletcher, R. B., (2011) *Intelligence and Intelligence Testing*, Routledge, New York.

Mackintosh, N.J., (2011) *IQ and Human Intelligence*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Silverman, L.K., (2013) *Giftedness 101*, Springer, New York.

Sternberg, R.J., Jarvin, L., & Grigorenko, E. L., (2011) *Explorations in Giftedness*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.