



Advocacy for Gifted and Talented in New York

A Place to Start: Is My Child Gifted?

The Davidson Institute for Talent Development

Determining whether or not your child is gifted is no easy task. As you have likely already discovered, there are a plethora of definitions, characteristics, assessments, theories - a virtual quagmire of information. To help parents unravel some of the conflicting information - both objective and subjective - the Davidson Institute for Talent Development consulted eight professionals, in 2001, recognized for their work with the gifted-talented population. They offered their insights on the rationale for testing, the appropriate age for assessment, what should be included in an assessment, and which tests they believe are most accurate and effective. Although new versions of several popular IQ tests have since been published, the core messages shared by these professionals remain relevant.

This article summarizes their views on why and when to seek an assessment, as well as the utility of different types of tests. Questions for parents to consider in the process of making such decisions are listed. Links to additional articles on assessment and its implications for educational advocacy and planning are also included. In addition, links to information on the most recent versions of the popular individually administered tests are provided.

Why Test?

Without exception, the experts we consulted cited school placement and educational programming when discussing why children should be assessed. Also without exception, the experts recommended a comprehensive assessment of the child's abilities rather than simple IQ testing. The rationale for assessment typically centers on the need for developing an understanding of a child's relative strengths and weaknesses and how these relate to educational and social settings.

Several professionals mentioned the fact that many schools and school districts do not offer programs or services based solely on IQ. Nancy Robinson, professor emeritus of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of Washington, suggested that IQ scores - particularly in the exceptionally gifted range - "aren't going to be as helpful as educational assessments, specifics about what a student is ready to learn." She added that IQ test information is more persuasive when accompanied by information about age- or grade-equivalence. She concluded by pointing out that specific schools may be more influenced by different information - portfolios versus achievement or proficiency tests for example.

The rationale for assessment conveniently coincides with the experts' recommendations regarding the best age for testing. Generally, testing is believed to be most reliable and most predictive between the ages of six and nine years old. Although many of the modern assessments are approved to be administered to children as young as two years old, the consensus among professionals is that there is rarely a need to test before the child is ready to enter school and that testing at younger ages may not provide reliable results.

"I do not recommend testing very young children," wrote child clinical psychologist Deirdre V. Lovecky, Ph.D. "Under about age four-and-a-half scores are exceptionally unreliable, so a parent can

feel their child is not gifted while it is a matter of neurodevelopment... Some kids are just too immature to assess at all. With young children I use a developmental history with examples, and look at particular skill areas. I usually ask parents to bring in an extensive portfolio of the child's work, as well as have them fill out an extensive questionnaire I have developed."

Which test is best?

After parents have made the decision to have their child tested, the question, "Which test?" will come to mind. If the parents have done any investigation on their own (which we recommend), they will quickly discover that not only are there many tests for intelligence, achievement and adjustment, but there seems to be little consensus about which tests are most effective, especially when dealing with exceptionally intelligent young people.

The most widely used intelligence tests have been criticized by the GT community. IQ tests were not developed to adequately identify individuals at the extremes. By definition, scores in the profound ranges occur less than one time in a thousand. Their infrequency makes accurate measurement difficult, so few tests have been written to assess the extremes. This situation has fueled a spirited debate about which test is best for highly able children. Because of the flawed options available for testing exceptionally intelligent children, experts recommend utilizing a variety of tests or test sections to get the best combination of skills assessments. Robinson, warning that achieving high IQ scores should not take precedence, indicated the primary goal of assessment is "looking at a pattern of abilities in a number of domains, getting a sense of how advanced a student is in each of them, looking at the strategies the student uses in solving problems, and observing his or her response to challenge and even bafflement."

Three of the experts we consulted - Feldhusen, Robinson and Sheely - specifically mentioned the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) as a good supplemental test for children who top out on individually-administered intelligence tests. All three noted that, particularly for children between the ages of 11 and 14, the SAT is a valuable tool because it was designed for older students, and therefore has very high ceilings. Sheely was careful to point out that the SAT is not an IQ test, "but it will help the parents and teachers understand how the child's strengths compare to other students." The SAT, and other similar out-of-level testing options, has the added advantage of being used by many talent searches across the country for identifying qualified students. Other achievement tests, such as those that comprise the Woodcock-Johnson are also of great value as they provide rough grade and age equivalents.

Out-of-level testing and the talent search model are addressed in the following GT CyberSource full-text articles:

"Discovering highly gifted students"

"The talent search as an identification model"

"Talent Search Opportunities for 2004-2005"

For additional information on assessment and its implications for educational advocacy and planning, please access the series of three exceptionally informative full-text articles, "Assessment, educational issues, advocacy: The process of parenting a profoundly gifted child," by Julia Osborn:

What about the New IQ Tests?

Several new versions of frequently used intelligence tests have been published since 2002. The Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-Third Edition (WPPSI-III) was published in 2002. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children- Fourth Edition (WISC-IV) and the Stanford-Binet, Fifth Edition (SB-5) were released in 2003. Professionals in the field have reported that it may still be months before these tests become widely used and accepted. In addition to the expense of purchasing a new test and training to use it, professionals must develop an understanding of the

altered items and their presentation, as well as become familiar with the behavioral and intellectual correlates of the scores generated by these tests. The Davidson Institute plans to provide additional information on these tests and their implications for use with highly able students as it becomes available.

As of this date, reviews of these tests were not yet available from the Buros Institute of Mental Measurements. However, on-line reviews will be made available on their website, which can be accessed via GT CyberSource. [Click here](#)

Information made available by the publishers at this time includes the following:

WPPSI-III (Harcourt)

WISC-IV (Harcourt)

WISC-IV Product Information

SB-5 (Riverside)

Use of the SB5 in the Assessment of High Abilities (Riverside)

What kinds of question should I ask a tester?

The following questions may be helpful in identifying an appropriate professional to evaluate your child and in preparing your child for an assessment experience.

Answers to many of these questions will be self-explanatory, while others will be more complex. If you receive answers that are not satisfactory to you, you may wish to seek a second opinion, if possible. Ideally, you will encounter a very knowledgeable professional who will conduct a comprehensive assessment of your child's abilities and make specific recommendations. However, if this is not the case, you will need to weigh the relative pros and cons of searching more broadly for an appropriate professional.

Credentials/Training

1. What is your training and background?
2. Do you have a Ph.D. in psychology?
3. Are you licensed and/or certified to practice as a psychologist?
4. What do you consider your specific area of expertise to be?

Experience with Gifted Children

1. How much experience have you had in testing very bright or precocious children?
2. What is your experience in working with a child of this age and with children of advanced cognitive abilities?
3. What is your professional experience with intellectually gifted children?
4. How much experience do you have in assessing giftedness?
5. What is your experience with exceptionally intelligent children?
6. Are you knowledgeable about the literature on extreme intelligence?
7. Are you experienced in testing lots of other types of children too?
8. Can you recognize common childhood disorders in gifted children?

NOTE: This is important to avoid missing a problem (all the child's problem behaviors are attributed to giftedness, mistakenly, because the tester does not know what AD/HD, depression, anxiety, Asperger's or bipolar disorder looks like in exceptionally bright young people). Conversely, it is important to have a tester who does not mistakenly attribute behaviors based on boredom to childhood disorders. On the whole, if a child needs more extensive neuropsychological evaluation, use an assessor who has experience with gifted children OR, if that is impossible, use one who is familiar with process testing. This means the test results are compared to the child's own norm not

expectations for age level.

9. Are you experienced and competent to practice with a youngster who is highly gifted?

NOTE: The National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, has a list of licensed practitioners that includes their documented areas of expertise.

About the Tests

1. What tests do you typically administer in the context of a comprehensive assessment?
2. What is your practice when you don't get the information you need from a standardized test, how do you gather other types of information about a child?
3. How do you decide which tests to use for a precocious child?
4. If a child reaches the end of a subtest or test, without reaching a ceiling, how do you interpret that and how do you indicate that in your assessment report?
5. How broad a look at our child's abilities can we expect?
6. What do you know about the different assessments available for assessing a gifted child? How do you evaluate issues of underachievement in gifted children?
7. What is your experience with "out-of-level" testing?

Information Needed about Child

1. What is the array of tests and information you have or need to have to evaluate my child?
2. How much do you want to know about my child's previous testing?

NOTE: The parent should inform the examiner of previous testing that the child has had and the results that were obtained, if these are known. If testing results are discrepant, one should ask for an interpretation of the conflicting results. It would also be helpful for the parent to share evidence of the child's talents both within the educational as well as home and community settings.

How to Prepare Your Child

1. How should I best prepare my child?
2. How do you prepare my child for the testing?
3. How long should we expect the assessment to last?
4. How are break times determined?

(Some questions are ones to be asked internally) How does my child respond to this individual? How do **I** respond to this individual?)

Meeting children's needs in school system

1. Are you in favor of special education services or programs to meet the special needs of precocious children?
2. Do you know the criteria for program eligibility at the state and local level? Often eligibility does not rest with just the scores on an IQ test.
3. How would you decide if a child was a candidate for grade or subject matter acceleration?
4. Are your test reports accepted by local schools and programs for the gifted as part of their admissions process?
5. Pragmatically, how can the information you expect to gather be put to use in the service of my child?
6. Have you worked with students in my school system before? If so, how would you describe your effectiveness?
7. Are you available to explain the educational implications of the test results to the school officials?

Follow-up

1. How will the results be explained to my child? Do you do this or will you advise us on how to do this?
2. If the results seem inconsistent with what was anticipated, what would be the next course of action, if any?
3. Will you be preparing a written report for us, as the parents, and will you be available to interpret the test results to school personnel if desired or necessary? When will we receive the report?
4. What are your procedures for providing results to my child's school?

NOTE: Some psychologists will provide a "sanitized" report to the school that thoroughly addresses test results and recommendations but doesn't include information that is unlikely to have a direct benefit for the child in the school setting. Information on family dynamics and labels, for example, is omitted so that parents have a choice of sharing the full evaluation report with the school.

Our panel: John F. Feldhusen, Ph.D. , Pat Howard, Ph.D. , Deirdre V. Lovecky, Ph.D. , Julia B. Osborn, Ph.D. , Steven L. Pfeiffer, Ph.D. , Nancy M. Robinson, Ph.D., Deborah L. Ruf, Ph.D. , Annette Revel Sheely, M.A.

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