Summary of Research on the Assumptions Underlying the Identification of Gifted and Talented Students

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This brief article is a summary of a longer publication that is based on a research project that produced some hard data to support the assertion that many people have made that the field is reexamining its attitude about the conception of giftedness and the types of information that should be used in the identification process. References and a detailed description of the methodology and results can be found in the longer article cited below (Brown et al., 2005). Strong agreement was found among classroom teachers, gifted education teachers, administrators, and consultants (experts in the field and state directors of gifted programs) from urban, suburban, and rural districts.

A 20-item survey was distributed to university professors, educational leaders in gifted education, gifted and talented specialists, administrators, and classroom teachers. All types of communities were represented, including those with diverse demographic, ethnic, and socioeconomic characteristics. The survey used a five-point scale. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each item. Sample items included statements such as the following:

- Identification should be based primarily on an intelligence or achievement test.
- Teacher judgment and other subjective criteria should not be used in identification.
- Identification should take into consideration the cultural and experiential background of the student.
- Giftedness in some students may develop at certain ages and in specific areas of interest.
- Regular, periodic reviews should be carried out on both identified and non-identified students

Summary and Recommendations

Overall, respondents disagreed with a totally test-score methodology and strongly supported approaches that used individual expression, on-going assessment, and context-bound identification procedures. Furthermore, they strongly agreed with the importance of using multi-criteria for the identification of gifted and talented students. This greater degree of flexibility in identification is especially important because of the

rapidly growing concern about the underrepresentation of low-income, minority, and dual-language students in special programs and services.

Although small discrepancies existed between the beliefs expressed by the various groups of respondents, educators in this study generally believed that more flexibility should be included in the identification process. The challenge for practitioners is to bring beliefs and practices together. To achieve this, the following strategies are suggested: biographical and autobiographical data provided by both teachers and students (Renzulli, 2021); products or portfolio reviews; performance assessment; product development analysis; and self-, peer-, or parent nominations. A flexible approach that is oriented toward developing gifted behaviors, rather than an absolutist view of "the gifted" is recommended. The identification system should include an on-going review of student progress that encourages talent development.

To help achieve these goals, we have designed a technology-based program that facilitates differentiation by electorally recording and analyzing students' strength-based information that produces a profile for each individual student (Field, 2009; Renzulli & Reis, 2009). A search engine that contains approximately 50,000 enrichment-based resources then selects and send to students resources that correspond with their profiles. Teachers can also use the system to enter curricular topics for which they would like to infuse enrichment activities.

1. Collect several types of information that portray a student's strength area and to regularly update this information.
2. Classify this information into the general categories of abilities, interests, learning and expression style preferences.
3. Periodically review and analyze the information for each student in order to identify an array of enrichment and acceleration experiences in the regular curriculum, the enrichment clusters, and the continuum of special services that will nurture the student's abilities and talents.
4. Initiate a shared decision-making process among teachers, students, and parents regarding the most appropriate acceleration and enrichment learning opportunities.
5. Communicate with parents about the school's talent development opportunities and their son's or daughter's involvement with them.
6. Synthesize educational and personal information about each student to facilitate career counseling.

The data collected by teachers and the decisions and recommendations made jointly by teachers, parents, and students are documented on the Total Talent Portfolio

(TTP). The TTP contains five sections sequenced purposefully to move the practitioner from information gathering to program planning for each young person: status information, action information, student's goals and co-curricular activities, action plan, and recommendations. The first section of the TTP concerns status information or the very best things we already know about a student, including academic strengths, interests, and learning and expression style preferences. The action information section provides space for practitioner to record new information we learn about a student, such as heightened motivation about a new topic. Student's goals and co-curricular activities complete the talent profile of the student, and a portion of the TTP provides space for this information. The last two sections of the TTP, action plan and recommendations, provide space for teachers, and students to record the high-level learning options in which student engage and document plans for enrichment and acceleration in the next academic year.

This study has important implications about the need for change in both policy and identification practice and its most valuable use to the field is that it should be brought to the attention of state and local policy makers that are responsible for developing state and district guidelines.

References

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