



Using Standards to Design Identification Procedures

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Four foundational issues have influenced the development of standards related to identification (Johnsen, 2008). These issues determine the design of the overall identification process, the assessments used, the interpretation of the assessments, and ultimately the students selected for gifted programming.

Issue 1. Gifts and talents are developed. The conceptualization of “giftedness” and “talents” influences the establishment of procedures for identifying and serving students. If educators believe intelligence is primarily innate and does not change over time (Jensen, 1980; Spearman, 1904), then they are more likely to believe that an intelligence test is the only instrument needed to identify those students who are *really* gifted. On the other hand, if they believe giftedness is more domain-related and diverse in its manifestations, then they will select an array of assessments for specific domains and alternative assessments that allow students to show their talents in varied ways. Theorists and more recent research suggest that giftedness is indeed developmental and includes a set of interacting factors such as general intelligence, domain-related skills, creativity, and environmental and nonintellective factors such as self-concept and mental health (Cattell, 1971; Gagné, 1999; Renzulli, 1978; Tannenbaum, 1991). All of these factors need to be considered when selecting assessments for the identification process.

Issue 2. Giftedness is exhibited not only within a specific domain but also within an interest area. Tests that examine a student’s achievement in a specific domain may not necessarily identify a student with a gift or talent. For example, a student who is interested in astronomy, specifically black holes, may not demonstrate his breadth of knowledge on a typical grade-level achievement test that is linked to school district or state benchmarks. This talent might be discovered only through information from home, products, and observations during free reading times or independent research opportunities.

Issue 3. The presence or absence of a gift is dynamic, not static. Researchers have raised questions about how well one-point-in-time assessments are able to identify learning potential, particularly with students from low-income backgrounds who have limited school-related experiences (Banks & Neisworth, 1995). Collecting information over time or in an interactive learning situation may provide more information about students’ abilities and their developmental trajectories (Budoff, 1987; Campione, 1989; Lidz, 1991; McCoach, Kehle, Bray, & Siegle, 2001).

Issue 4. Giftedness is exhibited across all racial, ethnic, income levels, and exceptionality groups. Ford (1996) estimates that African American, Hispanic American, and Native American students are underrepresented by about 50% in programs for the gifted. Given this underrepresentation, specific attention needs to be paid to ensuring that definitions encompass a wide range of student characteristics, developing positive teacher and parent attitudes toward gifted education programming and the diversity of gifted students, and selecting assessments that are fair to all populations.

Each of these issues (i.e., developmental and dynamic nature of giftedness, domain-specific and interest-specific knowledge and skills, and diversity) is reflected in the

three NAGC Programming student outcomes within the Assessment Standard (NAGC, 2010). The first standard requires educators to create a classroom that differentiates for students with gifts and talent; the second, to implement an identification procedure that is comprehensive, fair, equitable, and incorporates multiple assessments; and the third, to focus on diversity and equal access.

SETTING THE STAGE: STUDENT OUTCOME 1

While there are no parallel standards in the Texas State Plan (TEA, 2009), the first student outcome in the NAGC Programming Assessment Standard (NAGC, 2010) relates to establishing an environment where all students are able to show their gifts and talents:

All students in grades PK–12 have equal access to a comprehensive assessment system that allows them to demonstrate diverse characteristics and behaviors that are associated with giftedness (NAGC 2.1, 2010).

Collecting information over time or in an interactive learning situation may provide more information about students’ abilities and their developmental trajectories.

To ensure that this standard is implemented, educators need professional development regarding the variation in characteristics of students with gifts and talents and how to develop classrooms and other learning environments that differentiate for individual differences in content, rate, preference, and environment (Johnsen, 2004a).

- To differentiate what students are learning (i.e., content), teachers might use higher level questioning, use problem- or concept-based curriculum, add depth and complexity to their curriculum, provide variations in assessments and assignments, and allow students time to pursue their interests.
- To differentiate for how quickly students learn new content (i.e., rate), teachers might use fewer examples to teach something new, incorporate above-grade-level acceleration, use preassessment and curriculum compacting so that students do not have to review what they already know, and organize flexible groups around students’ academic strengths and interests.
- To differentiate for how students learn (i.e., preference), teachers might vary the method of presentation; give

students choices of products, processes, and content; and arrange for mentors to work with students in their interest areas.

- To create an environment that encourages motivation (i.e., environment), teachers might establish a system for long-range assignments, provide opportunities for independent research, offer open-ended, self-directed activities, and allow students to work by themselves, with others, and in small groups.

When teachers differentiate, students who have gifts and talents are more likely to show themselves and be recognized. Teachers also need to know that giftedness assumes many forms and not stereotype the characteristics of a “gifted child.” For example, researchers have reported that teachers who view vocabulary as an important characteristic rate the gifted characteristics of English language learners as lower than native English students (Fernández, Gay, Lucky, & Gavilan, 1998; Plata & Masten, 1998).

have fewer financial resources may need assistance in finding after school and summer enrichment programs that offer scholarships (Johnsen, Feuerbacher, & Witte, 2007). Parents also need to be aware of the available programming for students with gifts and talents and the assessment process. While parents from lower income backgrounds may be helpful in identifying their children for gifted programs (Johnsen & Ryser, 1994), some minority parents may not request evaluations of their child for future placement in the gifted program (Scott, Perou, Urbano, Hogan, & Gold, 1992). Therefore, it’s essential that parents be well informed so that they can not only provide opportunities for their children to develop but also important information to the school about their children’s talents.

GATHERING AND INTERPRETING ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE: STUDENT OUTCOME 2

Eleven of the Texas State Plan standards (TEA, 2009) focus on the second student outcome in the NAGC

The related evidence-based practices for this standard focus on three major areas: identification procedures, qualities of assessments, and interpretation of assessments.

Identification Procedures

The procedures for identifying students with gifts and talents need to be “comprehensive, cohesive, and ongoing” (NAGC 2.2.1, 2010). To address this practice, school districts need to look at their entire K–12 program to ensure that the identification procedures are in alignment with one another and with the program. For example, if the school district serves students with potential in math beginning in kindergarten, then what assessments might be used at each level? Would high performance on the assessments in the elementary school predict high performance on the assessments in middle and/or high school? Would high performance on the assessments predict high performance in the math programs for students with gifts and talents? These are important questions to address in building comprehensive and cohesive identification procedures. If not, then a student might conceivably be identified as gifted in math in the elementary school and then not be identified as gifted at the secondary level. Moreover, the assessments need to be ongoing. Not all children have similar educational opportunities and may not demonstrate their potential until they have access to challenging curriculum or a special teacher who has preparation in gifted education. Once they experience the challenge, they are able to show their gift or talent.

Comprehensive programs also need to have policies and specific provisions for addressing such areas as informed consent, committee review, student retention, student reassessment, student exiting, furloughs, and appeals (TEA 1.1, 1.2, 2009; NAGC 2.2.1, 2010). These provisions are listed in both the TEA and NAGC

When teachers differentiate, students who have gifts and talents are more likely to show themselves and be recognized.

To ensure that students are able to demonstrate their talents at home, parents also need to be educated about diverse characteristics and behaviors of children with gifts and talents, how to nurture their children, and the importance of gifted education. Parents need to become aware of enrichment opportunities and how to support their children’s interests. Those parents who

Programming Assessment Standard (NAGC, 2010), which relates to assessment evidence:

Each student reveals his or her exceptionalities or potential through assessment evidence so that appropriate instructional accommodations and modifications can be provided (NAGC 2.2, 2010).

standards and contribute to the program's cohesion across all grade levels.

Assessment Qualities

The selection of assessments is often dependent upon the characteristics of the available programming and the characteristics of the students. For example, if a school offers special programming for young scientists, then the identification instruments would most likely be different from those used for identifying students with potential in the writing area. In addition, if the majority of students within the district are from special populations (e.g., English language learners, low income), then different types of assessments might need to be considered such as those that are non-verbal or linguistically reduced. In all cases, the NAGC and TEA standards identify these assessment qualities as important:

1. *Variety of sources.* Multiple sources such as parents, teachers, students, and peers provide a variety of perspectives of a student's gifts and talents (Coleman & Cross, 2005; Johnsen, 2004b). It's particularly important to include the family and the community because not all students will exhibit their potential during the school day. It's equally important not to include the same source of information more than once. For example, a teacher might nominate students for gifted programming and also rate their products. In this case, one source is used twice and may bias the overall identification process.

2. *Qualitative and quantitative.* Using both qualitative and quantitative assessments provides a broader view of students with gifts and talents and provides different types of information (Ryser 2004a). First, qualitative assessments use words to describe a student's strengths and weaknesses whereas quantitative assessments use numbers. Second, quantitative assessments are static and controlled so results are consistent across testings whereas qualita-



tive assessments provide flexibility and more freedom. For example, a portfolio allows both the teacher and the student opportunities to select artifacts that might best represent the student's talents. Similarly, a teacher may collect data on how quickly a student learns or acquires new information by using a test-teach-test dynamic approach. On the other hand, an intelligence test needs to be administered using standardized procedures. Finally, since quantitative assessments are more controlled, they may not represent the student's performance in more authentic settings. Qualitative assessments have the advantage of simulating performance or gathering information from more real-world contexts. Ryser (2004a) adds a cautionary note to educators who assign numbers to qualitative assessments. In those cases where numbers are applied, the qualitative

assessment actually becomes a quantitative assessment and loses its power in providing more information about the student.

3. *Off-level testing.* Given that students with potential, particularly in the four core content areas, may be performing above grade level, off-level testing is needed to uncover their talents. On-level tests such as TAKS and most diagnostic achievement tests do not have enough ceiling so students are not able to show what they know. In fact, since assessments have more error at the upper end of a scale, students who are gifted in a particular domain may appear to perform more poorly than students who are on grade level.

4. *Nonbiased and equitable.* Students from special populations are underrepresented in gifted education programs (Ford, 1996). For this reason, special care needs to be taken to

ensure that assessments are nonbiased, equitable, and sensitive to culture. To guarantee more test fairness, test developers need to (a) have norms that are representative of the national population (Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Bolt, 2007), (b) limit linguistically loaded items when testing students who are English-language learners (Johnsen & Ryser, 1994), (c) use more performance-based items (VanTassel-Baska, Feng, & Evans, 2007), and (d) identify items that may have potential bias against particular groups (Ryser, 2004b).

5. *Technically adequate.* Assessments need to meet the standards outlined by professional organizations in the measurement field (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999). For the most part, these standards relate to reliability and validity. Reliability is defined by consistency within the assessment, over time, and across raters. Validity represents how well the assessment measures what it's supposed to measure. Educators in gifted education need to become familiar with resources that assist them in examining these technical assessment qualities so they may make informed decisions when selecting quantitative and qualitative assessments. (See Jolly & Robins, 2004, and the Buros Institute of Mental Measurements [<http://www.unl.edu/buros>] for test reviews).

Interpretation of Assessments

Once technically sound assessments are selected and the information is gathered, the data need to be interpreted by those who are familiar with gifted education and have knowledge about measurements. The Texas State Plan describes the number of hours of training in gifted education that the committee should have about gifted education (TEA 1.7, 2009). NAGC suggests that educators meet national teacher preparation standards (NAGC 6.1, 2010). The committee needs to have knowledge about the diversity of students who might be identified as gifted and/or talented and the influences that might affect their development.

The committee also needs to have psychometric knowledge and understand different types of scores such as raw scores, standard scores, percentile ranks; standard error of measurement; and the limitations of assessments (Johnsen, 2004b; NAGC, 2010). For example, if a student were to score 125 on an intelligence test, perform at the 95th percentile on an off-level achievement test, and be ranked within the 8th stanine on a teacher checklist, how would you describe his or her performance? If you said that the student was performing in the top 5% on all of the assessments, you would be correct. Caution does need to be exercised when comparing numbers, however. In no case should raw scores or grade/age equivalent scores be used when comparing performance across quantitative assessments or when adding ratings such as in a matrix; standard scores are generally best (Johnsen, 2004b).

Besides knowledge of specific types of scores, the committee also needs to understand that every measurement tool has error. Thus a score of 125 lies within a range of scores—the true score. If a student were to score 125 on a test and the standard error of measurement was plus or minus 3 points, then 99% of the time his or her score would fall within the range of 116–134 (about the 84th percentile to the 99th percentile). Tests also have more error in the upper ranges (e.g., 130 or greater). Therefore, extremely high, rigid cut-off scores on individual assessments should not be used because they do not consider the error in assessments. (For a more complete discussion of scores and error in assessments, see Johnsen, 2004b.)

Finally, the committee needs to understand that all assessments have limitations. They may not sample the behaviors that would show a particular student's talent. They might not be sensitive enough to identify those students who are performing above grade level or those who have disabilities that inhibit or mask performance. They may have bias toward particular groups. The school needs to select carefully the way that it organizes the data from assessments so that the presented qualitative and quantitative information shows each student's strengths and weaknesses and considers scores and measurement errors.

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Case Study Format for Organizing Assessment Data

Student: _____ Roger Ortiz D.O.B.: _____ 10-31-2003 _____ ID#: _____ 97-4253

Home School/Grade: _____ Spring/Grade 3 Date of Review: 3/18/11

I. Nomination <i>Scales for Identifying Gifted Students</i>	Score (Standard Score)	Met School Standard	Comments
Parents	95 th percentile (SS 124)	Yes	Likes building rockets
Counselor	91 st percentile (SS 120)	Yes	See interview
Teacher	84 th percentile (SS 115)	No	Doesn't do homework
Achievement <i>Iowa Tests of Basic Skills</i>			
Reading	84 th percentile (SS 115)	No	Above average range
Math	95 th percentile (SS 124)	Yes	Superior range
Science	93 rd percentile (SS 122.5)	Yes	Superior range
Social Studies	82 nd percentile (SS 113.5)	No	Above average range
Other: <i>Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking</i>	Verbal, 55 (5 th stanine) Figural, 95 (9 th stanine)		Parent submitted from previous school

II. Screening committee recommendation (committee members' signatures on back)

The Screening Committee has reviewed this student's data and has determined that he/she:
☒ Is recommended for additional screening.
☐ Is recommended and an exception is made because _____
☐ Is not recommended for additional screening.

III. Screening	Score (Standard Score)	Met School Standard	Comments
Interview	Exhibits characteristics	Yes	See notebook
Tests Administered:			
<i>Screening Assessment for Gifted Elementary and Middle School Students-2: Reasoning</i>	98 th percentile (SS 130)	Yes	Very superior range
<i>Test of Nonverbal Intelligence-4</i>	99 th percentile (SS 135)	Yes	Very superior range
Portfolio	Exhibits characteristics	Yes	Science experiments show complex thinking.

IV. Selection Committee Recommendation (see committee members signatures on plan):

Recommended for gifted education programming in science and math with support in reading.

FIGURE 1. Case 1: Roger Ortiz.

A model case study form for organizing information is provided in Figure 1. It is clear from Figure 1 that Roger's data from the nomination phase indicates that he has relative strengths in math and science and relative weaknesses in reading and social studies. Given that English was Roger's second language, the committee decided to use intelligence tests that were more nonverbal in nature during the screening phase and discovered that he was performing in the very superior range. Qualitative assessments such as interviews and portfolio items corroborated his superior performance in science. The committee recommended that he receive gifted education programming in science and mathematics and more classroom support in the area of reading, perhaps gearing his reading assignments toward his interest areas in science.

EQUAL ACCESS: STUDENT OUTCOME 3

The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education has been well documented (Daniels, 1998; Ford & Harris, 1994; Morris, 2002). Therefore, the final student outcome in the NAGC gifted education programming standards relates to equal access:

Students with identified needs represent diverse backgrounds and reflect the total student population of the district (NAGC 2.3, 2010).

This standard is very similar to Texas State Plan Standard 1.6 (TEA, 2009). Three other Texas Standards (1.1, 1.2, 1.5.2) also stress the importance of using nonbiased and equitable approaches for identifying students with gifts and talents. The sheer number of standards in both the Texas State Plan and in the NAGC Standards indicates the significance of including students from diverse backgrounds in gifted education programming.

Along with the selection of nonbiased and equitable assessments, educators need to be aware that bias may occur at any point in the identification process. For example, selective referrals sometimes exclude special groups (Frasier, Garcia, & Passow, 1995; Peterson & Margolin, 1997). Educators may develop their own conceptions of giftedness such as high verbal or academic ability and nominate children who model these characteristics (Dawson, 1997; Hunsaker, Finley, & Frank, 1997; Spiers Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007). Because of misconceptions, children who have disabilities, who are economically disadvantaged, or who are English language learners are referred less frequently (Harris, Plucker, Rapp, & Martinez, 2009; Morrison & Rizza, 2007; Peterson & Margolin, 1997; Plata & Masten, 1998). Moreover, without training and the knowledge of how to differentiate and challenge students, teachers often find it difficult to complete the required assessment forms and checklists reliably to validly refer a student for further testing.

Underreferral is also a problem for parents with fewer minority parents referring their children for gifted education programming (Frasier et al., 1995; Scott et al., 1992). Because parents are most often the best source of information for identifying students early for gifted programming, they need training regarding diverse characteristics, identification procedures, and the benefits of gifted programming. Researchers have reported that when minority students are identified early and attend classes for gifted and talented students, they have higher achievement than those who are placed in general education classrooms (Borland, Schnur & Wright, 2000).

Researchers recommend extensive training of educators who are involved in the identification process. When all educators are trained about specific characteristics of gifted and

talented students, they are better able to contribute to the identification process (Johnsen & Ryser, 1994; Shaklee & Viechnicki, 1995). Educators also include support personnel such as special education teachers, psychologists, counselors, and administrators since they may not have received any information about gifted and talented students in their educational preparation.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the developmental nature of giftedness and all of its manifestations is important as educators begin the process of developing and implementing standards-based identification procedures. The first NAGC student outcome in the Assessment Standard (NAGC, 2010) focuses on the dynamic interaction between gifted students and their learning environments. Only through the design of classrooms that differentiate for individual differences and homes that encourage interests are students able to develop and demonstrate characteristics and behaviors that are associated with giftedness. The second NAGC student outcome emphasizes the need for multiple assessments to capture the variation in talents and gifts. Assessments need to incorporate a variety of sources of information, provide both qualitative and quantitative information, be off-level, be nonbiased and equitable, and be technically adequate. Moreover, assessments need to be interpreted by those who are familiar with gifted education and psychological measurements. Finally, the overall identification procedures need to be sensitive to students who represent diverse populations. Selective and underreferrals can be particularly problematic for students who have disabilities or who are from lower income or minority backgrounds.

Given these issues and attitudes about high-ability learners, all educators (e.g., administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers,

gifted education teachers, counselors, psychologists) and families who are involved in the identification process need to receive professional development training in the characteristics of gifted and talented students, assessment procedures, and programming options. Local education agencies need to become familiar with the standards and allocate sufficient material and human resources so that training is sustained over time with regular follow-up. In this way, all qualified students will have access to nondiscriminatory procedures and programming options that will develop their gifts and talents.

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are not suffering from the “Jesse James syndrome?”

By focusing on the new State and National Standards and collecting data based on student outcomes, we will be able to responsibly evaluate the services we are offering gifted students and collect data that provide valuable rationale in support of the need for quality gifted programming. Then,

those responsible for making funding decisions (State legislators, school boards, district administrators) will be able to—practicing due diligence and with confidence—support appropriate services for gifted kids. It is really a matter of accountability . . . and doing the right thing, isn’t it? Don’t all kids deserve the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and be challenged?

Please note:

The State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students may be accessed in both English and Spanish at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3822>

The 2010 NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards may be accessed at <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=546>

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