

## CHAPTER 3



# Forks IN THE Road

## ASSESSMENT AND IDENTIFICATION OF GIFTEDNESS

### Purpose of assessment

Children who are gifted have exceptional learning needs at school, in the community and at home. Children who may be gifted are assessed in order to gain a better understanding of their learning and social and emotional needs. Schools require evidence of a child's special needs (either learning difficulties or exceptional learning abilities) in order to provide appropriate programming. Assessment provides such evidence and information to assist in planning for programming.

### To assess or not to assess

Parents need to decide a variety of factors in deciding whether or not to have their child assessed for giftedness.

Parents typically choose not to have their children assessed for the following reasons:

- they may feel that identification as gifted or receiving special programming could create social barriers between their child and his or her peers
- they may feel that special programming will be an extra pressure for their already sensitive child
- they may decide that their children are happy in their current classroom situation, and are receiving appropriate academic challenge and intellectual stimulation and are not in need of special programming.

Parents typically decide to have their children assessed for three major reasons:

- to learn more about their children's learning needs
- to help diagnose the cause of emotional or behavioural problems
- as an eligibility requirement for special programming options.

### Beginning the process

The assessment process often begins with the classroom teacher. Throughout the course of the school year, teachers have many opportunities to observe and identify individual children who appear to have exceptional learning needs. Parents are then contacted to provide further information and to give consent for formal testing.

In other cases, parents may take the initiative and approach the school to begin the assessment process. They may feel that their children need greater challenge and instructional and content adaptations in their current programming.

Some parents may choose to have their children assessed privately by a psychologist or non-school agency who is familiar with the needs of children who are gifted. There is usually a cost to this service, but that cost may be covered by some insurance and employee assistance plans.

## Giving parental consent

The school will contact you for your permission to begin your child's formal assessment process. To make an informed decision, you need to consider:

- purpose of assessment
- nature of assessment
- intended use of results
- who has access to results.

## How are children assessed for giftedness?

Alberta Learning recognizes different types of giftedness, including:

- general intellectual ability
- specific academic aptitude
- creative thinking ability
- social ability
- artistic ability
- musical ability
- kinesthetic ability.

Giftedness can occur in one or more areas. Children who are gifted and talented require differentiated programming to realize their potential.

Alberta Learning requires school districts to implement a planning process that ensures appropriate educational programming for students who are gifted. Jurisdictions use this process to develop a definition that reflects the district's beliefs and values about giftedness. Each school jurisdiction also establishes its own assessment process for identifying giftedness.

A fair and effective assessment process makes a deliberate effort to search for and identify the individual needs of children, based on their strengths, talents and interests. The data gathered should address fundamental questions, such as the following.

- What strengths or talents does this child demonstrate?
- What is happening now in the child's program?

- What adaptations, if any, are necessary or desirable?
- What data gives us a full picture of this child's academic, social and emotional needs?
- What additional data do we need?
- What particular interests and accomplishments tell us about this child's learning needs?
- How does information about the child's ability, interests and motivation guide us in instructional planning?

An assessment for giftedness needs to be a comprehensive package of multiple sources of information that includes some or all of the following:

- achievement testing
- intellectual testing
- creativity assessments
- student attitude and interest surveys
- parent observations
- developmental history
- teacher observations
- marks on classroom assignments, performance tasks, and tests
- work samples
- specialized assessment or performance tasks in talent areas, such as music, dance or sports.

Although IQ tests can provide useful information for making decisions for participation in gifted programming, they are less useful for identifying the most appropriate educational experience for individual children.

To find out more about what specific assessment data can tell you about your child's learning you will need to talk to the person administering the assessment (who will have graduate or post-graduate training in this area). This is especially important because standardized assessments are being constantly updated.

If the school screens all children at a particular grade level, the process will usually begin with a group-administered test. Some jurisdictions rely on teacher nominations to begin the screening process.

Many jurisdictions have developed behavioural checklists that the classroom teacher and parent complete. [See *Individual Rating Scale for Students Who Are Gifted* on page 16]

For older children, there may also be a self-assessment form that examines and identifies personal interests. [See *Interest Inventory for Elementary/Middle School-aged Students* on page 17]

In addition to performance on paper and pencil standardized achievement tests, information on students' achievement can come from compiling and assessing samples of students' work. The main advantage of using work samples is that the completed products reflect actual mastery of learner outcomes in the province's programs of study. Comparing a student's accomplishments against the curriculum can determine the extent to which the curriculum objectives are being met, and whether or not enrichment of the regular class environment is needed. The assessment of work samples is enhanced when more than one teacher evaluates the samples by using scoring rubrics that outline and describe criteria for different aspects of the work sample.

It is important that, as much as possible, your child has opportunities to be involved in the assessment process so they can better see and understand their own strengths and sustained interests.

It is also important that the assessment process is broad enough to identify not only academic needs, but also, social, emotional and psychological needs.

### Parent involvement in assessment

As parents, you can provide valuable information about your child, including a developmental history of your child's motor, language, cognitive and social skills. You can help identify your child's strengths and needs.

Your own documentation can be a great help. For example, when one family's Kindergarten child's teacher suggested an educational assessment for him, the mother realized that she had a ready-made set of observations to compare her son's development against standard development milestones. Like many mothers, she had kept a dated baby book of things her son did and said from babyhood on into the preschool years. These journal entries provided the psychologist who did the assessment with helpful background information. For example, the child was reading signs and using sounding out to spell basic words at an age when children are typically not yet speaking in complete sentences.

Parental knowledge can also be helpful in generating areas for further exploration in the child's Individualized Program Plan (IPP). [See *Parent Identification Form* on pages 18 and 19]

### Teachers' contribution to assessment

Classroom teachers can provide valuable insight into a child's learning process. They can document the particular academic skills that a child has mastered. Teachers can make observations to determine the learning conditions in which a child learns best and can also provide insight regarding peer relations in the classroom context.

In some school jurisdictions, teachers are the primary source for identifying students who may be gifted and need special accommodations in their education. It is important that all classroom teachers have a basic understanding of characteristics of students who are gifted.

## Individual Rating Scale for Students Who Are Gifted

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Year Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Check the box that best describes the frequency of the following characteristics and behaviours.

<b>1</b>	Does not demonstrate this trait
<b>2</b>	Demonstrates this trait less than the typical child
<b>3</b>	Compares with the typical child
<b>4</b>	Demonstrates this trait more than the typical child
<b>5</b>	Demonstrates this trait to a high degree

		1	2	3	4	5
<b>1</b>	superior powers of reasoning					
<b>2</b>	intellectual curiosity					
<b>3</b>	learns easily					
<b>4</b>	wide range of interests					
<b>5</b>	broad attention span					
<b>6</b>	superior vocabulary					
<b>7</b>	independent worker					
<b>8</b>	early reader					
<b>9</b>	keen powers of observation					
<b>10</b>	shows initiative and originality					
<b>11</b>	is alert					
<b>12</b>	memorizes quickly and easily					
<b>13</b>	interest in humanity					
<b>14</b>	unusual imagination					
<b>15</b>	ability to follow complex directions					
<b>16</b>	reads rapidly					
<b>17</b>	has several hobbies					
<b>18</b>	reads a wide range of subjects					
<b>19</b>	uses the library frequently and effectively					
<b>20</b>	superior mathematic skills					

Look for patterns of *Has this trait to a high degree.*

## Interest Inventory for Elementary/Middle School-aged Students

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Year Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

When assigning a topic for a report, suggesting a good book or selecting meaningful examples, it can be helpful to know students' preferences and interests. Use this interest inventory during the first week of school.

1	Outside of school, my favourite activity is
2	My responsibilities at home are
3	The sport I like to watch best is
4	The sport I like to play best is
5	After high school, I plan to
6	The job I want to be doing as an adult is
7	In school, my favourite subject is
8	The subject I do best in is
9	I would like to learn more about
10	In my free time I like to
11	For pleasure, I read
12	I spend about        hours or        minutes a week reading for fun.
13	The best book I have ever read was
14	The book I am reading now is
15	The kinds of books or stories I like to read are
16	My favourite magazine is
17	My favourite TV show is
18	I use the computer to
19	The part of the world that interests me the most is
20	When I am finished with school, I hope to live in

Adapted from Alberta Learning, *Teaching Students who are Gifted and Talented* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Learning, 2000), p. GT.238.

## Parent Identification Form

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Year Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

### Section A

Consider your child in relation to other children of the same age and check the box corresponding to the number that best describes your child for each item.

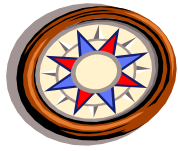
1	Does not demonstrate this trait
2	Demonstrates this trait less than the typical child
3	Compares with the typical child
4	Demonstrates this trait more than the typical child
5	Demonstrates this trait to a high degree

		1	2	3	4	5
1	Has advanced vocabulary; expresses himself or herself fluently and clearly.					
2	Thinks quickly.					
3	Wants to know how things work.					
4	Is an avid reader.					
5	Puts unrelated ideas together in new and different ways.					
6	Asks for reasons "why"—questions almost everything.					
7	Likes grown-up things and to be with older people.					
8	Has a great deal of curiosity.					
9	Is adventurous.					
10	Has a good sense of humour.					
11	Is impulsive.					
12	Tends to dominate others if given the chance.					
13	Is persistent—sticks to the task.					
14	Has good physical co-ordination and body control.					
15	Is independent and self-sufficient.					
16	Reasons well.					
17	Has a wide range of interests.					
18	Has a broad attention span that allows him or her to persevere in problem solving and pursuing interests.					
19	Shows initiative.					
20	Seeks his or her own answers and solutions to problems.					
21	Has a great interest in the future and/or world problems.					
22	Follows complex directions.					
23	Is prepared to take some social risks.					
24	Is a leader.					
25	Enjoys complicated games.					
26	Sets high goals for himself or herself.					
27	Continually questions the status quo.					

Reprinted from the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, Australia from *Bright futures resource book: education of gifted students* (pp. 65–67), by Department of Education, State of Victoria, 1996, Melbourne, Australia: Department of Education, State of Victoria. Adapted from *Education of the gifted and talented* (pp. 77, 86), by G. A. Davis & S. B. Rimm, 1985, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.

*Parent Identification Form ... continued***Section B**

<b>1</b>	Did your child read before he or she went to school? If the answer is YES, did your child teach himself or herself to read?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> NO
<b>2</b>	Does your child play a musical instrument? If YES, which? _____	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
<b>3</b>	In what outside activities does your child participate? _____ _____ _____		
<b>4</b>	What are your child's special interests or hobbies? _____ _____ _____		
<b>5</b>	What recent books has he or she read and enjoyed? _____ _____ _____		
<b>6</b>	Please comment, where appropriate, on any of the following: Your child's ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• unusual accomplishments or special talents</li><li>• preferred activities when alone</li><li>• expression of boredom</li><li>• special problems and needs.</li></ul> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____		



## Strategies for making assessment a positive experience for your child

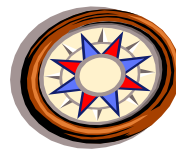
- *Be low-key and positive with your child about the assessment experience.* Talk about “helping the teacher to find out how you learn best.”
- *Discuss the types of questions your child might be asked.* Discuss the kinds of activities he or she might do, such as writing a story or putting together a puzzle. Explain that some tasks will be easier than others, but information from all of the tasks will help everyone understand how your child learns best so they can plan for the kinds of experiences that will make learning and school more interesting and more meaningful.
- *Get your child off to a good start.* Ensure your child has a good sleep the night before the test and leaves home with a healthy breakfast.
- *Ensure that the timing of the assessment is optimal for getting accurate results and causing minimal stress for your child.* If your child is ill on the day of the assessment, request that the session be rescheduled.

## Accessing assessment information

When the assessment is complete, the school will arrange a meeting with parents, the classroom teacher, other school staff and the psychologist conducting the assessments. It is preferable that the same person who conducted the assessment should interpret specific subtest results in the context of the child’s background. The goal of this meeting will be to discuss the results of the assessments and what these results

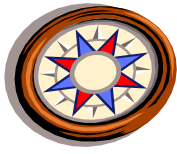
mean for your child’s learning needs and programming options. All test results should be shared with parents.

You also have access to your child’s cumulative record. The cumulative record contains information about your child’s attendance, school-awarded marks, results of standardized tests and other information. As a parent, you have the right to request to review the file. If you wish to do this, contact the principal to arrange for a convenient time. When you review the file, the principal or other school staff, such as the counsellor, can discuss test results or other information that is documented. If you feel the file contains outdated or non-essential information, you can request that the school remove this information from the file.



## Strategies for accessing and using information from assessments

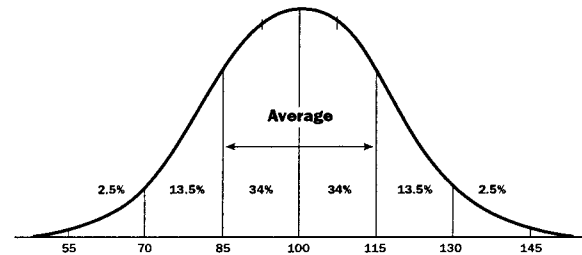
- *When the assessment report is available, meet with the person who did the assessment and other school staff who are working with your child.* The team will review the written report and answer your questions.
- *Ask for an explanation of any subtest scores on tests.* They indicate areas of relative strength and weakness, and this information can be helpful in planning for programming.
- *Make arrangements to have future questions addressed.* The information from the assessment may take time to digest and you may want to make arrangements for contacting the person who did the assessment if you have additional questions at a later date. Ask for a copy of the report to review at home.



## Strategies for talking with your child about giftedness

- *Consider how the assessment meeting might be an opportunity for your child to learn about their giftedness.* Participating in part of this discussion could help your child better understand his or her strengths and learning needs.
- *Acknowledge that your child may learn differently than his or her peers.* Most children who are gifted already feel this, and because no one talks about it, they may decide that different means something negative. Talking openly and honestly about your child's different ways of thinking and advanced abilities may bring relief.
- *Help your child find the words to explain his or her feelings of differentness.* Even a young child may need to know, "I learn things differently than some of my friends do. Sometimes I don't need as much time or practice to learn something new."
- *Create a context for understanding.* Discuss giftedness within the context of other differences that children have, such as eye colour, how fast you can run or what kind of books you like to read.
- *Consider how much specific assessment information to share.* Many school psychologists believe that a child needs to know the results of testing, including individual intelligence and achievement measures. How much specific information you choose to share with your child depends on his or her maturity level.
- *Consider using a visual.* Some parents find the normal curve can be a useful visual aid for explaining the overall IQ score on a standardized test to older children.

## IQ scores and percentage of students at each level



- *Be sure that your child understands that these assessment measures identify potential only.* Discuss how commitment, motivation and effort will result in accomplishment and achievement of potential, and that these qualities cannot be measured.
- *Have a family discussion.* If siblings are curious about the assessment process, discuss how each person learns differently and how this assessment will help identify how their brother or sister learns best.

## Which children tend to get missed in the identification for special programming for gifted education?

Certain populations of children tend to be under-identified in special programs for the gifted. They include the following groups of children.

- *Children from cultural and ethnic minorities*  
Children who have English as a second language may have high verbal ability, but in their native language. They may not be identified as gifted learners until they have learned enough English to cope with school programs and demonstrate their academic potential. Standardized tests are often biased towards majority (white middle- to upper-socioeconomic class) students. Also, children from cultural and ethnic minorities may have gifts and talents that are not understood or valued by mainstream society.

- *Children who have specific learning disabilities or academic difficulties in certain areas*  
A specific learning difficulty may mask giftedness. Not all children who are gifted excel in all areas of the school curriculum. Some may have an inordinate strength in particular subject areas, such as mathematics or science, and may in fact have some learning difficulties in other subjects, such as reading or writing. The academic difficulty may need special instructional accommodations, as do the areas of strength.
- *Children who appear to be underachieving*  
An underachiever is one who has the potential for greater accomplishment than is actually demonstrated at school. Often these students are perceived as unmotivated and are sometimes only identified as gifted when referred for assessment for other reasons.
- *Girls*  
Girls are often under-represented in programs for the gifted. Twice as many boys as girls are identified at the elementary level. Differing societal expectations toward girls is one possible reason. Some girls may learn to cover up or deny their abilities in order to be popular or feel “normal.” Or, if they are identified as gifted, they may choose not to participate in the gifted program due to social pressures.
- *Children who are perceived as having behaviour problems*  
Children who are gifted and exhibit irritating behaviours are often overlooked as candidates for special program options. The problem behaviours may mask the gifted potential of these students.
- *Children who are poor test takers*  
Some children who are gifted have difficulty with traditional types of tests and, as a result, score poorly and are not identified as gifted. This underscores the need for multiple criteria to identify gifted potential, such as parent and teacher nominations and work samples.

## What to do if you have concerns about the assessment of your child

If the school is reluctant to initiate testing, or school staff do not recognize giftedness in your child, request information from the principal on the school jurisdiction’s policy for gifted education. Review the criteria and, if you still feel your child demonstrates signs of giftedness and has exceptional learning needs, discuss your concerns with the school principal or staff in the jurisdiction office. Bring evidence of your child’s giftedness, such as behaviour checklists or work samples, to share at the meeting.

## Using assessment results for long-range planning

Parents can use the information from assessments to communicate with teachers, participate in IPP conferences, build on their child’s strengths and needs at home, and help their child plan for the future.

Assessment results give school jurisdictions valuable information that they can use to develop programming options and to create professional development opportunities for teachers and other staff. Knowing the number of students who are gifted, as well as the ages of these children and the types of giftedness they demonstrate, can help jurisdictions with comprehensive long-range planning.