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ABSTRACT

A teacher checklist was developed for student placement in a program for gifted and talented students. The District of Columbia had expanded its gifted and talented program for its intermediate grades (3, 4, and 5) to make the program a self-contained class in which children met for a full day once a week, with a thematic interdisciplinary curriculum emphasizing higher order thinking skills for each grade. As part of the program changes, a new rating scale was developed to describe the extent to which students demonstrated learning, motivational, and creativity characteristics. Seventy-one teachers responded to a survey designed to identify students for the gifted and talented program. The 20 items teachers thought would be most effective were compiled into a teacher checklist to represent one-third of the data on which the placement decision would rest. Teachers began to use the checklist with the understanding that it would be subject to further evaluation. (Contains 1 table and 11 references.) (SLD)

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Eligible for Placement in a Gifted and Talented Program

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October 2000

Paper Presented at Annual Meeting of the Northeastern Educational Research Association,  
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Statement of problem and purpose of study:

The Gifted and Talented Program in the District's intermediate schools (serving students in grades 3, 4, and 5) was expanded. The program became a self-contained class in which children were grouped by grade level and met for a full day once a week, with each grade meeting a different day. Each school was assigned its own teacher. A thematic interdisciplinary curriculum emphasizing higher order thinking skills was developed and implemented for each grade.

Eligibility for placement in the Gifted and Talented Program was based on standardized tests that assessed student ability and student achievement in reading and mathematics. The tests were administered district-wide to the entire student population at targeted grades. Teachers also completed a rating scale to indicate their estimate of each child's characteristics. The purpose of the rating scales was primarily informational, as placement decisions depended on high test scores.

The expansion of the program into a full-day class that met once a week meant that students missed all activities that occurred that same day in the regular classroom. To succeed in the large enrichment group setting and also keep up with studies in the regular classroom placement despite their absence for one full day each week, students must be capable and motivated. It soon became evident that numbers on the ability and achievement tests were not entirely predictive, as some students who did attain the requisite numbers did not participate effectively in the Gifted and Talented Program and/or were unable to sustain success in the regular classroom.

Teachers believed that their recommendations, based as they were upon interaction with and knowledge of the students, enabled them to be a valuable predictor of student success and should be considered in the placement decisions. Students with high test scores did not consistently attain positive teacher assessments. Also, teachers were eager to obtain placements in the Gifted and Talented Program for children they perceived as having potential for success in the newly expanded program even though the students did not meet the minimum ability and achievement test scores required for placement into the program.

These factors culminated in the emerging importance of a rating scale that teachers completed to describe student characteristics.. A rating scale used for assessing students who met ability and achievement requirements for placement in the Gifted and Talented Program was already in place in the district. The rating scale had been developed “in-house” by the teacher of a now-defunct pull-out Gifted and Talented Program based upon characteristics she had identified from various sources. Her sources were an instrument previously used in the district that identified seven motivating characteristics, five learning characteristics, seven creativity characteristics, and seven leadership characteristics (Shanahan, 1990), and a Multi-Dimensional Screening Device (MDS) for the Identification of Gifted and Talented Children that was adapted from the Fairfax County Public Schools and Forest Lake Area Schools (1975 and 1993). The MDS included 13 items for *Demonstrated Creative or Productive Thinking*, 13 items for *Academic Ability in a Particular Discipline*, 9 items for *General Intellectual Ability at or above the 1 out of 100 Range*, and 7 items for *History and Use of Spatial and Abstract Thinking*.

Although the rating scale was intended to identify the extent to which students demonstrated learning, motivational, and creativity characteristics, no attempt had been made to analyze the items or validate the instrument.

Analysis and validation of the existing rating scale was the focus for this study.

### Theoretical framework

Purcell (1978) referred to gifted children as “.... possessing or demonstrating potential abilities that give high performance capability ....” Renzulli’s (1978), three-ring conception of giftedness describes an interaction among three clusters of traits: above average ability, task commitment, and creativity. Academic skills assessments would not in themselves predict giftedness as individuals with above-average (as opposed to superior) ability may very well be gifted. Clark (1992) spoke of giftedness as advanced and accelerated brain function. All agreed that the children who are identified as gifted require services not ordinarily provided by schools, thus providing a rationale for the expanded Gifted and Talented Program which the Commack School District was now providing.

The school district supported the belief that teacher observations were an important part of the student placement decision, and moreover that a teacher rating scale could provide important information about the likelihood of student success, thereby agreeing with McCarney and Anderson (developers of the Gifted Evaluation Scale, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) who posited their confidence in teachers’ ability to identify students with exceptional learning skills and behaviors.

Our review of standardized teacher rating and observation scales found many that were lengthy and time-consuming, and that provided information that the district did not meet the needs of the district.

We observed that the meaning of giftedness has changed over time (Purcell, 1978; Renzulli, 1978; and Clark, 1992) and that the definition remained controversial. Our review of instruments that were developed in and currently used by neighboring school districts convinced us that we could create a practical and focused instrument to meet the needs of our own school district.

#### Methodology (instruments, procedures, sampling, analyses)

A committee of teachers, psychologists, administrators, and researchers reviewed all the items on the instrument that was currently used in the school district. They decided to retain items on the rating scale with which teachers were familiar. Recommendations were as follow:

- § Items were ambiguous. It was not clear what was being asked or answered. Example: One item stated ... *Student reads a great deal on his/her own; does not avoid difficult material; may show a preference for biography, autobiography, encyclopedias, atlases, travel, folk tales, poetry.*
- § Items were not precise. The different parts of the items may be measuring different variables. Example: One item stated .... *Student has rapid insights into cause-effect relationships; tries to discover the how and why of things; asks many provocative questions; wants to know what makes people tick.*
- § Items must identify the qualities that our district is seeking in students who we want to refer to this program. We need to review items to ensure that they identify the types of characteristics that we believe should be considered in selecting students for the program. “Giftedness” by itself does not sufficiently define the student we want for this program. Certain behavioral and motivational characteristics that are desirable should be reflected in the rating scale.
- § Items need to be weighted appropriately for our needs. The instrument currently incorporates three rating scales: learning characteristics (9 items); motivational characteristics (8 items and pupil creativity characteristics (10 items), the sum of which are combined into one score.

One goal was to achieve clarity and precision. Where ambiguity was observed, items were revised. One item, for example, read as follows: *Has rapid insights into cause-effect relationships; tries to discover the how and why of things; asks many provocative questions; wants to know what makes people tick.* This item was separated into four discrete items, which, although still undefined, at least narrowed the scope of the question. The committee agreed that the expressions (such as *what makes people tick*) were intuitively understood by teachers and, therefore, did not need definition.

After a list of items based upon the original rating scale was developed, the next step was to identify items that would characterize eligible students who would succeed in the newly configured Gifted and Talented Program. Classroom teachers of grades 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 were asked to rate the extent to which each of the items would identify a student who, in their opinion, would be eligible for and successful in the Gifted and Talented Program. The purpose was to select items with the highest level of discrimination for a measure that would effectively distinguish students who would or would not succeed in the program.

### Results, conclusions, and educational implications

Seventy-one teachers responded to the survey. Table 1 presents teachers' responses to the questionnaire. The mean response and standard deviation are presented for each item. Average mean ratings for the items ranged from 2.4 (sd = 0.73) to 3.8 (sd = .04) on a 4-point scale. Items did, then, vary in the extent to which teachers believed that they identified the types of characteristics that teachers believed would distinguish students who would or would not succeed in the program.

The 20 items that teachers thought were most effective in distinguish successful students were compiled into a *Teacher Checklist* that would be used in the district to assess students who are likely to meet eligibility criteria for placement in the Gifted and Talented Program. Students' scores on the *Teacher Checklist* would now be weighted as heavily as a score on an ability test or on an achievement test. Teachers were advised that they must complete the *Teacher Checklists* carefully, as teacher ratings for each student would now provide a full one-third of the data upon which the decision for placement into the Gifted and Talented Program was based, equal in importance to the ability and achievement test scores.

Teachers and administrators understood that *Teacher Checklist* was a work in progress. Plans for future study include (1) correlating scores on the *Teacher Checklist* with (a) students' ability test scores, (b) achievement test scores, and (c) performance in the Gifted and Talented Program, and (2) conducting factor analysis to for the items on the *Teacher Checklist* to explore validity and possible weights.

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Table 1

Teachers Ratings of Qualities They Consider Characteristic of a Student They Would Recommend for Placement in the Gifted and Talented Program

	mean*	sd
thinks critically, judges, evaluates, compares, contrasts, predicts	3.80	.43
is able to maintain a high level of learning in the regular classroom despite being pulled-out for a special program	3.73	.58
is able to be successful in an accelerated curriculum	3.72	.59
desire to achieve	3.66	.56
asks insightful questions	3.66	.53
prefers to be challenged	3.63	.54
is persistent, goal-oriented, and completes tasks	3.63	.57
good concentration (sustained over period of time)	3.59	.55
is an independent thinker	3.52	.61
is inquisitive	3.52	.73
willing to take risks	3.48	.63
learns quickly	3.39	.64
is a self-directed learner	3.39	.73
gives original ideas and examples	3.38	.62
thinks logically	3.35	.68
comprehends abstract ideas	3.32	.61
knows how to seek information	3.27	.76
is imaginative	3.23	.61
has effective organizational skills	3.23	.74



	mean*	sd
is keenly observant	3.18	.66
is an avid reader	3.18	.76
is inventive with materials or ideas	3.17	.68
solves problems by ingenious methods	3.10	.79
uses good judgment	3.06	.68
is flexible and open-minded	3.01	.82
has a rich, fluent, vocabulary	3.01	.69
has a good memory	2.83	.65
tolerant of ambiguity	2.79	.67
displays intense interest in hobbies, special topics, or projects	2.76	.80
reads non-fiction	2.66	.83
shows leadership, takes charge	2.61	.80
is self-critical	2.56	.74
uses elaborate expression	2.51	.69
strives for perfection	2.35	.94
has a keen sense of humor	2.31	.86
tolerant of ambiguity	2.79	.67
is able to translate verbal information into visual representations	2.61	.85
expresses strong feelings and opinions	2.41	.73
self confident	2.41	.73

\*4 = a **critically important** characteristic of a student who I would recommend to the G & T program

3 = **usually** characteristic of a student who I would recommend to the G & T program

2 = **sometimes** characteristic of a student who I would recommend to the G & T program

1 = **not** characteristic of a student who I would recommend to the G & T program

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