Broad approaches for identifying gifted and talented students
(from the Moe Handbook: *Gifted & talented: Meeting students' needs in schools* (2000))

There are two different philosophies of identification:

- the formal data-gathering approach
- the responsive learning environment approach.

In the first approach, a team of professionals uses a systematic, school-wide approach that includes a battery of tests and rating scales. The identification process usually takes one or two months, with programmes for the identification of the gifted and talented being comprehensive, carefully planned, and set in place for a year or more.

In the second approach, the teacher is a key catalyst for setting up challenging learning experiences that encourage those with special abilities to ‘surface’. The teaching programme offers opportunities for higher level thinking, creative thinking, and original student research.

**Teacher nomination**

This is one of the most commonly used methods of identification, and its effectiveness varies enormously. Identification of gifted and talented students improves when teachers are informed of the nature and purpose of the programme for gifted and talented students. Teachers are likely to support their judgments with the help of tools, such as checklists, teacher observation scales, and student portfolios.

**Rating scales**

Rating scales can help teachers identify gifted and talented students by focusing on typical behavioural characteristics. Without rating scales some of these characteristics might otherwise be overlooked. The accompanying *Teachers’ Handbook* contains information on:

- the kinds of students for whom the scales were designed
- when the scales should be used
- the content of the scales
- information on scoring
- technical information on reliability and validity.

The five scales relate to:

- learning characteristics
- social leadership characteristics
- creative-thinking characteristics
- self-determination characteristics
- motivational characteristics.

**Standardised tests**

Standardised tests of one form or another are amongst the more commonly used measures for identifying the gifted and talented. Some tests used for this purpose are:

- tests of intelligence or scholastic ability
- tests of achievement.

Standardised tests have both advantages and disadvantages as instruments for identifying the gifted and talented. Some of the advantages are high reliability, relatively high validity, and the existence of national norms. They are also relatively inexpensive (as group tests) and are useful for initial screening.

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) series of Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) in reading, mathematics, and listening comprehension can be useful for initial screening.

However, some standardised tests, such as the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking, lack validity, while others have a low ceiling and a cultural, and gender, bias. Some standardised tests are inappropriate for students with reading and language difficulties.

**Tests of intelligence or scholastic ability**

These tests can be classified into:

- individual tests
- group tests.

Individual tests, such as the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Revised (WISC-R), are administered orally by qualified psychologists. Subjects reply orally to most questions. The WISC-R yields a verbal IQ, a performance IQ, and a student profile derived from all the subtest scores. A full-scale IQ test is also given.

Group tests of scholastic ability, such as the Test of Scholastic Abilities (TOSCA), can be administered by teachers. Students read the test items and write their answers. Group tests of scholastic ability may be appropriate for initial screening but are unsuitable for children with reading difficulties and for some children from different ethnic groups.

Tests of intelligence can also be classified as:

- verbal
- non-verbal.

The Standard Progressive Matrices (with New Zealand norms) is an example of a non-verbal test. It can be useful for children from different cultural and ethnic groups, and for children for whom English is a second language.

Identification should never rely on intelligence tests alone, whether group or individual, but should include other forms of evidence from other methods.

**Teacher-made tests**

Some teachers are well qualified to design tests of their own tests. Some of these tests can be targeted towards students with special abilities in specific curriculum areas. They may contain a high percentage of items at the upper level of Bloom's Taxonomy (see Curriculum Models section), as well as some open-ended and divergent-thinking items. Some teachers also develop local norms.
Portfolio assessment

Student portfolios are a useful form of assessment and can be helpful in identifying gifted and talented students. They have the advantage of focusing on the individual child's performance.

Portfolios offer opportunities for examples of ‘best performance’ and can show systematic evidence of student achievement over time. They also allow for a rich variety of student choice in terms of content and learning style, and encourage higher levels of thinking and reflective practice.

The reliability and validity of portfolio assessment, however, remains problematic because the assessment of them is subjective.

Parent nomination

Parents and caregivers have a wealth of knowledge about their children that can be useful in the identification process. Some schools have parent/caregiver interview forms that contain questions related to examples of advanced development, such as:

- early reading
- advanced language skills
- advanced reasoning ability
- intellectual curiosity.

Such advanced development can be precursors of giftedness. Parent judgments are particularly important when students from minority ethnic groups are being considered.

Self-nomination

Self-nomination is a useful form of identification for some educational programmes. It is valid for identifying areas of unique special ability and interest, such as computers, poetry, musical ability, and social and ethical concerns. They can be facilitated through teacher-student interviews or through interest inventories and questionnaires, which list a wide range of special interests.

Self-nominations can, however, be subject to bias in that some students lack a realistic appraisal of their own abilities. On the other hand, some students may be reticent to put their name forward despite having exceptional abilities. This may be particularly the case with students from M_ori and Pacific Islands cultures.

Peer nomination

Peer nominations can be effective for identifying students who show special abilities both inside and outside the classroom. Examples include:

- sporting abilities
- musical ability
- social leadership
- community service
- business acumen
- special interest in science.
Peer nomination can be used in conjunction with self-nomination and teacher nomination. Some teacher rating scales for identifying gifted and talented students also suggest that peer nomination be used in tandem with the teacher rating scale.

They might ask "Who, in your class...

- solves difficult problems quickly and easily? (learning scale)
- makes a good leader? (social leadership scale)
- has the most original ideas? (creative-thinking scale)
- expresses their own ideas forthrightly? (self-determination scale)
- works well on their own? (motivational scale)"

Peer nominations made on the basis of such questions can then be compared with the results of using the scales. If self-nominations are also used, the resulting triangulation increases the reliability of the results.

It is important that peer nomination forms consider key areas of behaviour that closely relate to the concept of giftedness and talent, including behaviours and values that are relevant to different cultural and ethnic groups. Peer nominations can be helpful in identifying students with special abilities from minority cultural groups, and students with disabilities.