


# Expanding the Conception of Giftedness to Talent Development

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## Abstract

To determine if a person is gifted or not, the government sets the criteria of identification since giftedness is an abstract concept. However, the standard has always been decided and affected by the attitudes of the education authority and the allocation of resources. The opportunities for some potential learners to participate in gifted programs are often closed because of high identification criteria on standardized tests, especially intelligence tests. To bridge the achievement and the opportunity gaps between regular and gifted students with disabilities or different cultural backgrounds, educators are encouraged to apply the talent development model to develop hidden potential rather than focus on identification or labeling students as “gifted.” Every child is unique and has strengths and weakness. It is time to change the rigid concept of giftedness and expand the concept to discover multiple talents. The most important aspect is no longer defining intelligence merely as *g* or IQ.

## Keywords

Giftedness, identification, talent development, twice-exceptionality

## To Be Gifted or Not Gifted

The term “giftedness” has incomparable charm. Most parents can barely hide their smiles and pride once their children are labeled gifted because being gifted is considered a guarantee of smartness, supernormal intelligence, outstanding achievement, and prestige in the future. However, if we examine those who performed exceptionally in their areas of expertise, few of them were identified as gifted during school. It is challenging to tell whether an extraordinary individual who reaps excellence is gifted or not.

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R. J. Sternberg (2019) pointed out that intelligent individuals need to adapt well to the challenges of the different environments they encounter over the course of their lives. Looking at skills that are relevant to the children's everyday adaptation is a more practical way to assess intelligence. Sternberg's theory of adaptive intelligence (Sternberg, 2020, 2021) reminds the community that the traditional procedures used to identify gifted students need to change. We no longer can afford to define intelligence merely as  $g$  or IQ.

From my experience attending committee boards for identifying gifted students, I noticed that often "identification" was kidnapped by "regulations." Sometimes, regulations override professional judgments; the high-level standard or criteria of identification prevent students who are not high in intelligence or aptitude scores from getting into gifted programs. In reality, the criteria of identifying gifted are always decided or affected by the attitudes of the education authority and the allocation of resources. When administrators prefer to expand the gifted population, the criteria set are low. On the contrary, the criteria are raised if the administrators prefer a smaller gifted population. Therefore, the same student may be identified as gifted in some years with a lower standard and may not be gifted in some years with a higher standard.

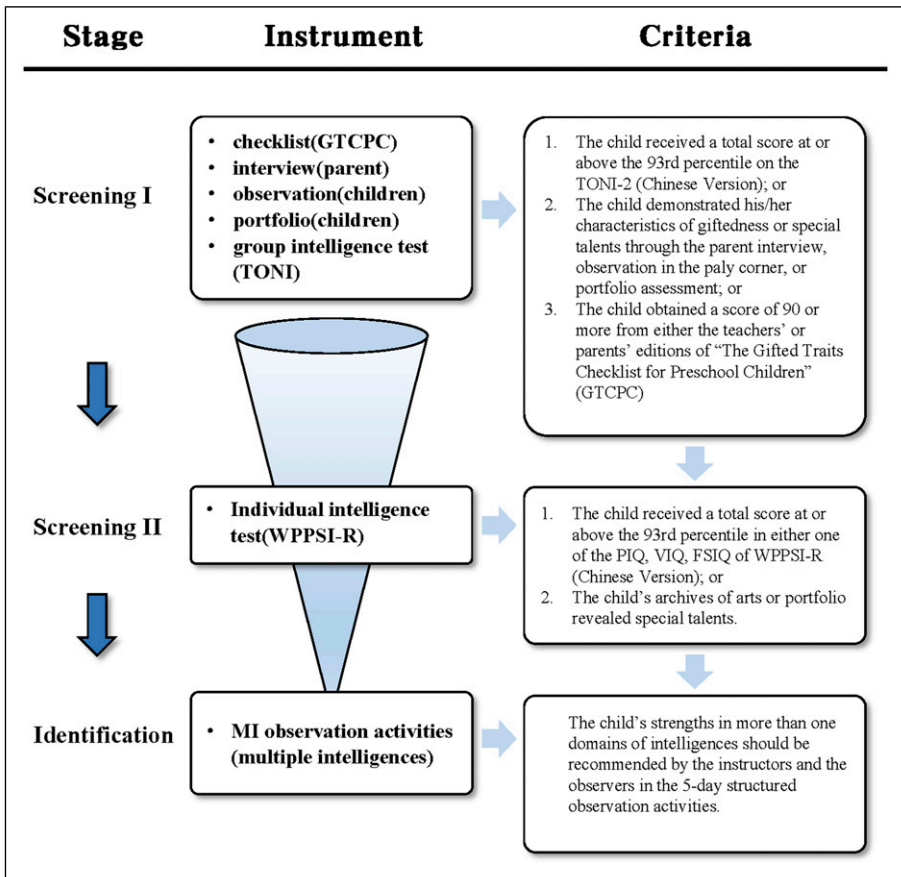
Are the criteria of giftedness so important? If you ask an administrator, the answer definitely is "Yes" because those involved in gifted education need to follow the principle of fairness. Under the fairness principle, the opportunity to participate in gifted services is blocked for some potential learners based on arbitrary standard. But we have to ask, what is intelligence?

Since L. Terman, 1925, high IQ has become synonymous with giftedness. However, due to the limitation of testing time or assessment methods, the content of an intelligence test is inadequate to assess superior talents in many areas. Besides, many mental abilities are overlooked as the intelligence tests are usually targeted at explicit behaviors or cognitive abilities. For students from different cultures or with different kinds of disabilities, standardized tests like IQ tests fail to discover multiple talents.

In the multiple-talent approach model, Calvin W. Taylor (1968) emphasized that giftedness is not limited to academic talents, but includes other abilities necessary to cope with real-life situations. The multiple-talent model reminds teachers to see the potentials besides academic performance to build students' self-concept and help them develop many kinds of talents.

To identify gifted preschoolers, the "Enrichment Program for Cultivating Problem Solving Abilities and Multiple Intelligences for Gifted Preschoolers" (PSMIGP program) was implemented from 2003 to 2007 (Kuo et al., 2010). The identification process consisted of three sessions as Figure 1 shows. In the model, nine young children with disabilities were identified through behavior observation, a gifted trait checklist, portfolio assessment, performance assessment, and interviews with parents.

The children's artwork or portfolio revealed special talents; their strengths in more than one domain of intelligence were discovered through multiple assessment. In a word, their outstanding performance could not be recognized by using a single individual intelligence



**Figure 1.** Identification model for multiple intelligences.

scale. In their later career, they became musicians, dancers, painters, technicians, etc. Their parents are very impressed that this project discovered their children’s talents early and provided enrichment opportunities.

The other project, “The talent development program of young artists with ASD,” was implemented from 2012 to 2014 (Kuo et al., 2016). This weekend enrichment program invited professors in art and music and dance therapists to host courses in creative design, art creation, and expressive art therapy. Parent and student consulting services were also provided in the program to reduce issues such as anxiety originating from school adjustment and parent-child colliding engagements or parent-child disagreements. After this program, they also attended another 3 years of social skills training by using video modeling package to improve their social skills at the workplace. In the talent development program, the portfolio assessment and performance assessment were used to

identify the young talents. At the beginning, none of them were labeled as “gifted.” However, they showed outstanding achievement during these 6 years. One was awarded first place in Chinese painting in the High School Student Art Concourse in Taiwan; two of them were named among the Ten Outstanding Young Persons of 2015 and 2017, respectively; two artists’ works were recognized by the Collector, 2021, etc. Now, they have started their careers in the arts area, they are able to support themselves, and have become well-known artists.

From the above description, we can conclude that labeling students as gifted is not as important as offering opportunities for developing their talents.

### **Limitation of Laws and Regulations—Take Taiwan as an Example**

The legal basis of gifted education in Taiwan is the Special Education Act, which was promulgated in 1984. The amended Special Education Act of 1997 expanded the categories of gifted/talented education to six categories: “superior intellectual ability,” “giftedness/talent in scholastic ability,” “giftedness/talent in visual and performing arts,” “giftedness/talent in creativity,” “giftedness/talent in leadership,” and “giftedness/talent in other areas” (as shown in [Table 1](#)). The scope of gifted education was enlarged to include multiple intelligences, multiple assessments, and expanded services for more learners. In particular, the category of “giftedness/talent in other areas” refers to excellent potential and outstanding performance in any area that indeed meets the spirit of nurturing multiple talents.

However, the Identification Criteria of Disabled and Gifted Students, revised in 2006, raised the criteria of giftedness from 1.5 *SDs* above the average score up to 2 *SDs* above the average score, so the gifted education services are currently limited to those students with high intelligence and high aptitude/achievement. If we look at the numbers of gifted students from the Ministry of Education’s Special Education Transmit Net, amongst the 1,173,872 students enrolled in the elementary schools, there are 6586 students identified as gifted. The occurrence rate of general superior intelligence at the elementary level is only 0.56%. Even more, there were only 376 students identified as twice-exceptional at the 1-12 grade level in 2019.

Twice-exceptional (2E) learners are students who have coexisting giftedness and disabilities in one or more domains that need support from both gifted and disability education ([Baum, 2004](#)). The 41st article of the Special Education Act revised in 2009 mentioned that local authorities and schools should reinforce diagnosis procedures and counseling services for gifted students with special needs and socioeconomic disadvantages. For the twice-exceptional learner, the individuals’ giftedness masks their disability or their disability masks their giftedness; the masking phenomenon obscures and challenges the identification process and educational placement of the twice-exceptional students. Finding and meeting the needs of the twice-exceptional can be a challenge for many teachers, especially for general education teachers. They need to have a comprehensive understanding of twice-exceptionality and help develop students’ talents. Due to the fact that most unidentified 2E students with hidden gifts are served in

**Table 1.** The identification and assessment method of the gifted.

Assessment tool	Observation/ recommendation	Standardized tests (+1.5 SD)	Performance assessment	Competition records	Archival evaluation	Interview
1. Superiority in general intelligence	★	★				
2. Giftedness/talents in scholarship	★	★	★	★	★	★
3. Giftedness/talents in visual and performing arts	★	★	★	★	★	
4. Giftedness/talents in creativity	★	★	★	★	★	★
5. Giftedness/talents in leadership	★		★			★
6. Giftedness/talents in other areas	★			★	★	

general or special education classes, improving the awareness, familiarity, and knowledge of teachers, particularly general and special educator teachers, is important. Enrichment opportunities for gifted educators are also important to the future of the twice-exceptional. The achievement gap between 2E students and the gifted will be able to be closed only through a joint effort of all kinds of teachers and educators. Collaboration would be easier if supported and encouraged by the government. Legislation, policy, and financial support can help guarantee opportunity and services for the 2E population and protect the rights to benefit from education opportunities. In my experience of offering enrichment learning experiences to twice-exceptional preschoolers and young artists with autism, some participating individuals who did not meet the criteria for giftedness have performed excellently in their advantaged areas in later years.

### **Time to Change the Rigid Concept of Giftedness**

Every child is unique and has his/her strengths and weaknesses, but not all children can meet the high criteria for gifted identification. It is time for us to change the conception of giftedness. A positive talent development experience helps educators to open up the opportunity for more learners to achieve their fullest potential. Identifying talents in multiple areas will be a lens through which educators can re-examine the current gifted program and identify gaps and areas in need of improvement (Plucker & Barber, 2021). Dai (2019) reinstated the topic of talent development in developmental research, and proposed to enrich understanding of human development. The research was based on a developmental systems framework. It integrates the role of natural endowment (nature), environmental experience, and the exercise of agency (emergent personal effectiveness). He emphasizes that talent is structural and functional changes indicative of evolving complexity of the developing person over time. In the model, Dai developed a multi-level analytic framework; Level I is aptitudes and dispositions in foundational domains, Level II is characteristic adaptation (CA)—responds to or seeks certain developmental opportunities, and Level III is a unique human tendency to purposefully initiate and sustain a particular line of talent development. The Dai model pointed out the concept of talent development requires systematic process and adaption.

In conclusion, to bridge the gap of achievements in modern society, I believe the educators will agree that developing different kinds of talent is more important than labeling students as “gifted.” It is believed that additional and joint efforts by all teachers could allow every child to thrive and develop his or her potential.

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