

香港資優教育學院
The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

Factsheet

PROFESSIONAL TESTING (IQ TESTS)

Very able and gifted children need to be identified so that their intellectual and their social/emotional development can be well managed and not stifled. How this should be done, however, depends on the age of the child, and whether they are happy or presenting problems to parents and/or to school. The view that a child is very able or gifted can stem from a number of different sources:

Observation

In favour

- carried out by those who know the child best - parents
- does not stress the child in any way
- carried out in unthreatening environment (home, playgroup, peer-group)
- the only possible strategy for under-fours

Against

- parents need to assert their conclusions to others (sceptics?).
- the outcome is open to challenge by professionals
- parents may feel outcome lacks credibility

Formal Testing

Human ability is not something which can be described by a single measurement although much effort was put into the attempt to do this in the first half of the 20th Century. The more understanding of the brain's complexity we gain and the more we find out about how learning takes place, the less reliance we want to place on measures which claim to put groups of children in order - high to low.

In favour

- testing is carried-out by a qualified educational psychologist
- tests give a precise outcome, within known limits
- the results can be very useful in giving parents and teachers a view of ways forward
- the test selected must match with the problem presented, and the results need professional interpretation and explanation to parents and teachers.

Against

- simple, off-the-shelf commercial tests can be extremely misleading. It can also be an expensive process.
- testing can be a stressful process, particularly for younger children. Testing is time-consuming for all involved.

Who should identify highly able children?

In common with good practice world-wide, parents are the best placed people to observe whether their offspring are developing skills and talents significantly in advance of their peers. These characteristics begin to become evident in the pre-school phase through activities such as early talking, unusual levels of concentration, creative connections of ideas and many more.

We believe that in this pre-school phase formal assessment is not appropriate for the vast majority of very highly able children. Parents may find problems at toddler group or playgroup or pre-school

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nursery because the staff do not accept that the child can easily do the things the other children are enjoying doing. Their child is quickly bored and becomes a problem! This should best be managed by discussion between parents and staff as to how flexible the activities can be. If the pre-school group proves to be inflexible (all children must do the same thing at the same time) then parents might want to question the appropriateness of that group for their child.

The hope that an assessment which shows a high score will force the group to change their approach may not succeed and can lead to confrontation, with parents feeling that they have been labeled as "pushy" or interfering.

Assessments at School

Once a child is at school some aspects change, if issues have developed, such as the child does not want to go to school, is bored at school, is unhappy, has become withdrawn, then parents need to work in partnership with the school, the class teacher and the Head to expose the issues in a non-confrontational way. The merits of an assessment can then be discussed.

It is good practice for schools to have a written policy on how they manage their most able children. This should include how children are identified and what measures are put in place to stretch and challenge them. The policy should have the full support of the staff and the parents. Parents are entitled to ask if such a policy exists and to ask to see it.

Identifying older children as having unrecognized abilities, gifts and talents is always a sad occurrence, for it represents a waste of earlier opportunities. If the abilities are not recognized and encouraged early on then there is the risk that the child will become withdrawn, or will merge into the crowd, or develop a disruptive pattern of behaviour, all of which detracts attention from their ability and may go on undetected for many years. It is often when schools undertake a formal assessment on the basis of poor behaviour that the truth is revealed- the child is a high ability low performer!

Assessment Service

Children can be assessed through EDB or School-based Educational Psychologists if they have learning or behaviour difficulties. There is, however, not necessary for an EP assessing a child on the basis of high ability. If after discussions with the school, a parent still feels that they need to have a private assessment undertaken, any registered psychologist from private clinics or NGOs can do the psychological assessment or IQ test. But it is suggested that parents understand the actual needs and an understanding of what support will be given in the school as a result of the findings. Too often private assessments are made but the school and educational psychologists do not accept the findings on the basis that the test was inappropriate, or there were unrealistic recommendations.

Private Intelligence Testing

Many parents enquire about having their child's IQ tested. This can be helpful, but is by no means always necessary.

The measurement of 'intelligence' was developed in the early years of this century in the hope of

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discovering an objective method of assessing the potential and capability of individuals. However, nervous or immature children, who don't enjoy seemingly pressured situations, can easily fail to do themselves justice, and some may not be totally applicable if there is a specific language mismatch, such as a child being brought up with a language different from that of the test. An IQ score might not provide comprehensive information and identify other strengths such as creativity and leadership ability among others.

Adapted from NAGC Factsheet



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