INTRODUCTION TO GIFTED ASSESSMENT

WHO ARE THE GIFTED?

At first blush, it might seem as though we can quickly dispense with the question, exactly who are the gifted? If you work in the schools, then you know exactly who they are. The gifted are those students who meet the eligibility criteria that your school district and state have stipulated for this group. And if you are a graduate student in psychology, then you also know who the gifted are. They are those students who have obtained an IQ test score that exceeds a certain threshold, according to what you learned in your assessment of intelligence course. These are the views of a great many practitioners and graduate students, according to a recent national survey (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012) and as gathered from informal conversations at school psychology conferences and workshops here in the United States and also internationally.

As you will quickly learn, however, this book departs from the traditional and some might argue outdated and even archaic view of who the gifted are and suggests a more nuanced perspective of what is meant by giftedness. High IQ equals gifted was the view that dominated twentieth-century thinking in both psychology and education. But we are now in a new millennium and have learned much from research in developmental psychology, the cognitive neurosciences, and the talent development field since the early days of gifted education, and this new information better informs our understanding of high-ability students—the gifted (Pfeiffer, 2002, 2003). In the next chapter, we will examine a few models of giftedness that lead to different ways to conceptualize giftedness and define the gifted student. Most would agree that the young child who is reading at age 3, excelling at competitive chess by age 6, or playing the violin in an orchestra at age 10 is gifted. These examples are indicative of children who are developmentally advanced, one hallmark of giftedness (Pfeiffer, 2002, 2012). Most authorities on giftedness agree that academically gifted students are those in the upper 3–5% to 10–15% (the exact range depending on the authority) compared to their same-age peers in general.
intellectual ability, distinguished performance in one or more academic domains, and evidence of creative work (Pfeiffer, 2003, 2012). Not surprisingly, there is a genetic influence in the expression of giftedness, at least at the high end of the IQ continuum (Plomin & Spinath, 2004). For example, the fields of music and mathematics are particularly rich with examples of child prodigies. Evidence also comes from the emergence of eminence among young children from impoverished environments (Nisbett, 2009). However, most developmental psychologists and behavioral geneticists also agree that the unfolding of gifts requires a nurturing and supportive environment, available resources, certain personality characteristics, and even good fortune (Nicpon & Pfeiffer, 2011; Pfeiffer, 2012, 2013b). More on the topic of who exactly the gifted are will be presented in Chapter 2.

What follows are working definitions that begin to answer the question of who the gifted are. These definitions are based on my tripartite model of giftedness, which I will explain shortly. The first is a definition of the gifted child:

The gifted child demonstrates a greater likelihood, when compared to other students of the same age, experience and opportunity, to achieve extraordinary accomplishments in one or more culturally valued domains [Pfeiffer, 2013b].

According to this definition, a child’s gifts can be in any culturally valued domain, such as academics, athletics, the performing arts, leadership and student government, or even community volunteerism. The list of gifts is almost inexhaustible, limited only by what the community and the culture value and deem important. In most cultures and societies, as the child gets older there is increased opportunity for exposure to a growing number of domains in which the adolescent and young adult can come to excel and even gain expertise and eminence. For example, the young girl who demonstrates precocious mathematical abilities at age 6 or 7 will likely find a wide variety of academic and career domains to excel and become distinguished in as a young adult.

This definition of the gifted child reflects the view that this child demonstrates a greater likelihood of achieving extraordinary accomplishments in one or more culturally valued domains than other children of the same age and with the same opportunity (Pfeiffer, 2013b). The next definition describes the academically gifted student. It is conceptually similar to the definition of the gifted child, and fully consistent with the tripartite model of giftedness that you will be introduced to
shortly. This second definition of the gifted is intentionally more narrowly focused on academics and schooling:

The academically gifted student demonstrates outstanding performance or evidence of potential for outstanding academic performance, when compared with other students of the same age, experience and opportunity, . . . and a thirst to excel in one or more academic domains . . . . [T]he academically gifted student is likely to benefit from special educational programs or resources, especially if they align with their unique profile of abilities and interests [Pfeiffer, 2013b].

Frequently the academically gifted student’s academic needs are not being substantially met in the classroom or school, and quite often this student requires specialized programs, services, or activities not ordinarily provided in the regular classroom—not always, but oftentimes. This failure points to what really should be the primary rationale and justification for gifted assessment in the schools—to determine whether a student has uncanny intellectual abilities and/or outstanding academic performance or evidence of potential for outstanding academic performance, frequently indicative of a need for special educational programs or resources not presently available in the regular classroom.

**BRIEF HISTORY OF GIFTED EDUCATION**

Much has been written about the history of giftedness and gifted assessment (e.g., Mönks, Heller, & Passow, 2000; Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 2008; Tannenbaum, 1983, 2000). Anyone working with high-ability students should take the time to become familiar with this literature. I am reminded of the warning that those who don’t study or respect history are more likely to repeat the mistakes of the past. The same is true for gifted assessment and gifted education. An appreciation of the history of gifted education over the past one hundred years will enlighten the practitioner about what has been tried and has worked, as well as what has been tried and has failed. With this knowledge we can avoid repeating the mistakes of the past!

As far back as Confucius in China and Plato in Greece, philosophers wrote about “heavenly” (gifted) children. Their writings not only theorized about what constituted high ability but also provided practical recommendations for how society should go about identifying and nurturing these special young citizens (Mönks et al., 2000). Early philosophers embraced views that giftedness constituted a set of special attributes that we today would view as aspects of cognitive ability (Pfeiffer, 2013b).
In the United States we trace the early roots of attention to the gifted to the research conducted by Lewis Terman, a professor at Stanford University. Terman conducted a large longitudinal study in California that followed a cohort of students who had tested with IQ scores at or above 140. Terman collected tons of data on these students over the course of fifty years. He stated that the “twofold purpose of the project was, first of all, to find what traits characterize children of high IQ, and secondly, to follow them for as many years as possible to see what kind of adults they might become” (Terman, 1925, p. 223; Terman & Oden, 1951, p. 21). Terman concluded that children of high IQ (140 or higher) were healthier, better-adjusted, and higher achievers than unselected children (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 2008). This early work set the stage for establishing within the education and psychology community what Dai (2010) calls a gifted child focus.

There are other early scientific studies and writings on the gifted, such as Galton’s *Hereditary Genius* (1869) and Cattell’s *A Statistical Study of American Men of Science* (a series of articles published from 1906 to 1910) (Whipple, 1924). However, nothing quite captured the imagination of the public as Terman’s *Genetic Studies of Genius* did (Mönks et al., 2000). More than any other individual, Terman helped to define and conceptualize giftedness as high IQ. Almost one hundred years later, Terman’s influence on the gifted field remains prominent. The gifted child focus emphasizes general intelligence and assumes that the gifted constitute a clearly demarcated and fixed category of exceptional individuals who differ in a number of quantitative and qualitative ways from their nongifted peers. The gifted child focus dominated twentieth-century thinking. It has been the major zeitgeist in gifted education up until the last ten to fifteen years. A relatively new focus is now emerging and is beginning to challenge the predominant gifted child focus. This new focus has been labeled a talent development perspective (Dai, 2010; Pfeiffer, 2013b). More will be said about this second perspective shortly and in the next chapter.

Another influential figure in the history of gifted education, and one of my former professors and mentors at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, is James Gallagher. In 1960 Gallagher submitted a report to the Illinois state legislature whose purpose was “to review and summarize all of the information now available relating to the education of gifted children” (Gallagher, 1960, p. 3). Gallagher’s report, *Analysis of Research on the Education of Gifted Children*, concluded that “special programming for gifted children requires additional personnel and services” (p. 131). Gallagher pointed out that only 2 cents out of every 100 dollars spent on K–12 education in the United States supports the gifted, and that existing programs for the gifted do not reach nearly enough of the
gifted students in America’s schools. He added that special programs for the gifted are a low priority at all levels of government, that the federal role in services to the gifted is all but nonexistent, and that “gifted students have been relatively ignored in educational programs such as No Child Left Behind” (Gallagher, 2008, p. 7); this is also true of the more recent federal Race to the Top initiative. In 2006, for example, the U.S. Department of Education spent nearly $84 billion. The only program specifically funded to address the education of the gifted got $9.6 million, 1/100 of 1% of federal education expenditures. Like many authorities in the gifted field, Gallagher embraced the gifted child focus. His illustrious career (which, sadly, ended in 2014) included passionately advocating for meeting this group’s unique needs.

A number of other individuals have been influential in the history of gifted education in the United States, and most of those who worked during the twentieth century have adopted a gifted child focus. Leta Hollingworth (1886–1939), for example, played an important early role with her case studies of high IQ students in the New York City schools. Hollingworth was a psychologist who practiced in New York City at about the same time that Terman was a professor at Stanford. Hollingworth is the author of the first textbook on gifted education, *Gifted Children: Their Nature and Nurture* (1926).

The United States has been slow to respond to the educational needs of students of high ability. This lack of attention has also been true globally. Many authorities feel that the ambivalence and disinclination of federal governments, and of many states in the United States, to address the unique learning needs of high-ability students is the result of society’s perception that they are already a privileged group who will do quite well without special funding or services (Stephens, 2008, 2011). There is also a sense that the principle of equity trumps the principle of excellence in driving educational policy. And yet the National Science Board (2010) recognizes this dilemma in American education. It has stated in a report that “the opportunity for excellence is a fundamental American value and should be afforded to all” (p. 5). A recent editorial in the *New York Times* mirrored this point with the headline, “Even gifted students can’t keep up”; the
editorial bemoaned the performance of U.S. students on the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment test, which was poor compared to that of students from many other countries (The Editorial Board, 2013).

One final point bears mentioning in this intentionally brief overview of the history of gifted education and gifted identification. A recent survey indicates that substantial changes in definitions and categories of giftedness have occurred over the past decade. States vary considerably in how they identify gifted and talented students in their schools. A majority of states still anchor gifted assessment to Terman’s view that giftedness equates to high IQ, although they don’t use quite as high a threshold or cut score as Terman did for demarcating giftedness. States also frequently endorse a multiple cutoff or averaging approach to decision making about who the gifted are (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). More will be said about different decision-making models in Chapter 7. It is fair to conclude that states continue to embrace a gifted child focus and have not yet considered a talent development perspective that downplays general intelligence, is more domain or specific talent centered, and less exclusive (Dai, 2010).

**GIFTEDNESS AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION**

There exists in education and among educators of the gifted the myth that giftedness is something real. It is a popular belief among both professionals and the lay public alike. Many educators and psychologists continue to believe that giftedness is real, something concrete, analogous to height, weight, or hair color or similar to biomedical conditions such as diabetes, spinal meningitis, or arteriosclerosis. This belief is the hallmark of the gifted child focus. Many in the gifted field still believe, as Annemarie Roeper (1982) first advocated, that the gifted “think, feel, and experience” the world differently; “giftedness is a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences” (p. 21). The reality is that, in Borland’s words, “giftedness is not a fact of nature, but, instead, a social construction” (2009, p. 237). It is not akin to weight, hair color, or diabetes. The concepts of normal, subnormal, and supernormal (or gifted) are human inventions, not discoveries of nature. Although we often talk in the schools about giftedness as something real, something that children either are or, sadly, are not, something with an existence independent of our naming of it, it is nothing more than a social construction. It is an invented way of categorizing children (Borland, 2005). In my opinion, this is an extremely important point—that giftedness is a social construction, not something real. Anyone who is involved in assessing giftedness needs to appreciate that he or she is measuring or gauging a
psychological construct that is a human invention. Assessing the height or weight or visual acuity of a child is a less subjective enterprise. We need to respect that when we talk about giftedness, we are considering a created concept that is useful and can be operationally defined and measured, but not something real in nature. Juvenile diabetes, for example, is something real, with clear signs and (biophysiological) indicators that differentiate children with and without this disease. There is a clear etiology, set of symptoms, course over time, and (we hope, effective) treatment regime for those with the disease. And there is a fairly clear distinguishing line (or joint, as it is called in medicine) that differentiates the patient with diabetes from the patient without it. The same is not quite true for giftedness. Those of us who work in the schools should never forget this important and not insignificant distinction.

Historically, each society has used the concept of giftedness as a label to explain and recognize those individuals who perform exceptionally well in whatever domains that society values. Cultural anthropologists remind us that what constitutes giftedness in a, for example, hunting and gathering society, differs markedly from what is viewed as giftedness in an industrial or postindustrial information- and service-driven culture. It is not difficult to envision that an individual considered gifted in one society—for example, an innovative and highly successful Silicon Valley software programmer—might not possess the requisite attributes or abilities to merit the gifted label in other societies or regions of the world (Pfeiffer, 2013b).

This myth that giftedness is something real and not a social construction is no minor influence. It has had huge implications for how we view students of uncommon or exceptionally high ability—whom we label the gifted (S. B. Kaufman, 2013; Nicpon & Pfeiffer, 2011; Treffinger, 2009). It has had huge implications for how we go about assessing gifted students in the schools. And it has had huge implications for the rules and regulations we establish for providing programs and services for those students whom our assessments deem as gifted. Much more will be discussed on these very topics throughout this book.

TRIPARTITE MODEL

This discussion of giftedness as a social construction and not something that is real logically leads to the question, well then, who exactly are the gifted, and how
should we conceptualize giftedness? This is a very important question, and I will discuss it next.

There are many different ways to conceptualize giftedness. There are educational conceptualizations, political conceptualizations, philosophical conceptualizations, and psychometrically driven conceptualizations. No one conceptualization is correct. They are all simply different ways to view individuals who are in some way special or unique. In Chapter 2 we will examine a few leading conceptualizations, or models, that have been proposed by authorities in the gifted field. Each of these gifted models presents unique ideas that can help practitioners more easily understand and communicate what is meant by students of uncommon or exceptional ability and promise. As I will discuss in the next chapter, these models differ in important ways.

I have proposed a conceptual model for academic giftedness that I call the *tripartite model of giftedness* (Pfeiffer, 2013b). This model provides three different ways to view students with uncommon, advanced, or exceptionally high ability. The model also offers three different ways to assess and array special educational programs for these three different types of high-ability students. The tripartite model incorporates three distinct but complementary lenses through which one can view academic giftedness. The three views that are the foundation of the tripartite model are simply three alternative ways to consider assessing and grouping students of uncommon or high ability.

- Giftedness through the lens of high intelligence
- Giftedness through the lens of outstanding accomplishments
- Giftedness through the lens of potential to excel

The first perspective, the *high intelligence* viewpoint, will be familiar to most readers. When we view giftedness through this first lens, a test of intellectual ability or its proxy is used to assess students who are functioning at a certain level considerably above average intellectually. Other tests or procedures can supplement or replace the IQ test, but the criterion for high intelligence giftedness is based on compelling evidence that the student is advanced intellectually when compared to his or her peers. This first gifted perspective can follow a general (g)
or multidimensional view of intelligence (e.g., Cattell-Horn-Carroll [CHC], structure of intellect, or multiple intelligences). It can even be based on a neuroanatomical model of giftedness; recent work, for example, has postulated that more intelligent children demonstrate a more plastic cortex, with an initial acceleration and prolonged phase of cortical increase, followed by a period of vigorous cortical thinning by early adolescence (Shaw et al., 2006).

Adherents of this first perspective have historically tended to de-emphasize the role of learning or the acquisition of skills over time and through experience. More recent theorists who embrace this perspective, however, recognize the importance of experience and learning (e.g., Gottfredson, 1997, 1998).

The rationale for gifted programs based on viewing giftedness through the lens of high IQ is that students with superior intelligence need and/or are entitled to advanced, intellectually challenging, and/or faster paced academic material not typically found in the regular classroom. Gifted education based on a high intelligence perspective consists of a highly accelerated and/or academically advanced and challenging curriculum. Another assumption underlying the high intelligence perspective is that students of superior intelligence should be entitled to special gifted education throughout their education (Pfeiffer, 2013b).

The second perspective, the outstanding accomplishments viewpoint, does not deride or criticize the importance of high intelligence. Many advocates of this second perspective, in fact, consider an IQ test score one useful but not necessarily central measure when identifying academically gifted students. However, this second perspective does emphasize performance in the classroom and on academic tasks as the central or defining characteristic of academic giftedness. According to this second perspective, evidence of academic excellence is the sine qua non to qualify as a gifted student and to qualify for admittance into a gifted program, not high IQ (Pfeiffer, 2013b).

Psychologists and educators who embrace this alternative and second perspective would rely on direct academic performance measures to assess gifted students, not tests of intellectual ability that measure cognitive skills but not necessarily direct evidence of “authentic” academic excellence. The importance of creativity is often emphasized when viewing giftedness through this second lens. Also, the importance of assessing motivation, drive, persistence, and academic passion—clearly nonintellectual factors—is emphasized by many advocates of this alternative way of conceptualizing giftedness (Pfeiffer, 2012, 2013b). These nonintellectual factors, of course, affect the learning and talent development of all students, not only students of exceptionally high ability (S. B. Kaufman, 2013).

The rationale for gifted programs based on an outstanding accomplishments perspective is that students who excel academically have earned and deserve special
academic programs because of their outstanding effort and superior classroom accomplishments. Gifted education based on an outstanding accomplishments perspective is slightly but not radically different from gifted education guided by a high intelligence perspective. In gifted programs designed for students demonstrating outstanding accomplishments, programs would consist of highly enriched and academically challenging curricula (Pfeiffer, 2013b).

The third lens through which one can conceptualize academic giftedness, based on the tripartite model, is what I call potential to excel. Some students—for any number of reasons—have not been provided enough opportunity or the proper intellectual stimulation to develop what remains latent and as yet undeveloped or underdeveloped intellectual or academic gifts (Pfeiffer, 2013b). This third perspective is based on my experience working with many students of high potential, the experience of countless others, and an abundant body of research (Irving & Hudley, 2009; Nisbett, 2009).

I think most knowledgeable individuals agree that not all students start out on an equal footing. Some children being raised in poverty, children in families in which intellectual and educational activities are neither encouraged nor nurtured in the home or in which English is not the primary language spoken in the home, and children growing up in rural or overcrowded or dangerous communities where intellectual stimulation and educational opportunities are rare are all at a distinct disadvantage for developing their gifts (Ford & Whiting, 2008; Nisbett, 2009; Pfeiffer, 2002, 2012, 2013b).

Psychologists, educators, and parents who advocate for this third perspective view the potential to excel as a defining characteristic of what I have termed the almost or potentially gifted student. From this third perspective, the student with high potential to excel is seen as very likely to substantially increase his or her cognitive abilities and academic performance when provided with special resources or placement in a special gifted program. The assumption underlying this third perspective is that with time, an encouraging and highly stimulating environment, and the proper psychoeducational interventions, these students will eventually actualize their yet unrealized high potential and distinguish themselves from their peers as gifted.

In other words, when identifying students with a high likelihood of gifted status, the premise is that with enough nurturance, stimulation, and encouragement, these students will demonstrate significant increases in their IQ and/or significant increases in their academic performance—considerably more than what one would expect from students with less potential. Gifted education based on a potential to excel perspective should consist of a highly motivating and enriched curriculum that may include compensatory interventions.
It is useful to think of academically gifted students in the schools as falling within one or more of these three categories based on the tripartite model of giftedness. The three categories serve to eliminate much of the acrimony often found when local schools or state departments of education try to adopt only one, typically narrowly defined conceptualization of giftedness (e.g., the psychometric or high IQ model, in which a student needs to score above a predetermined cut score to qualify as gifted). The three categories are quite easy to understand. And perhaps more important, each of these three categories lends itself to distinct gifted identification/assessment and curriculum and instruction schemes (Pfeiffer, 2002, 2013b).

Individuals in the first category of the gifted, students with exceptionally high intelligence, typically have IQ scores in the top 2% to 5% when compared to other children of the same age.1 In the early years, these students obtain IQ scores of 135–150 or higher, and in middle school, when tested above-level by the regional talent search programs,2 they obtain SAT or ACT scores in the top 1% to 2% of the population. It is important to emphasize that there is nothing scientific or exact about a 2% or 5% threshold or cut score demarcating intellectually gifted from not intellectually gifted. The myth that giftedness and high IQ are synonymous contributed to the early belief that there is some magical cutoff that separates gifted from not-gifted individuals. Nothing is further from the truth. If we accept that giftedness is a social construction, not something actually real in nature, then we also can appreciate and remember that where we draw the line separating gifted from not-gifted is also arbitrary (Pfeiffer, 2012, 2013b).

The second category of gifted in the tripartite model, academically gifted learners, are academically precocious, do exceptionally well in classroom activities and assignments, enjoy learning and academic challenges, and demonstrate persistence and high motivation when facing academic challenges. When tested, they are found to have above average IQs, most typically 120 to 130 or higher, to enjoy school and schooling, and to be highly enthusiastic about learning. They are characteristically among the most capable students and are top-performing students in the class. Teachers love

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1. In many countries the designated cut score is higher, for example in Singapore and Hong Kong giftedness is defined by intellectual functioning in the top 1%.

2. The talent search model, founded at Johns Hopkins University, is an above-level testing program. Regional talent searches have been conducted at Johns Hopkins, Duke, and Northwestern Universities for over thirty years.
to have these students in their classroom. IQ tests are not necessary—although often helpful—to identify this group of gifted learners. Performance in the classroom and on academic tasks is the hallmark that identifies these academically capable learners.

The third category of gifted within the tripartite model consists of students with high potential to excel. They are often recognized by their teachers and others as bright or quick learners, hardworking, and highly curious about the world around them. They may not test exceptionally well on standardized aptitude or achievement tests. Their IQ test scores may fall short of established thresholds or cut scores for gifted consideration, sometimes as low as 110–115. Their achievement test scores and classroom performance may also fall short of the outstanding performance demonstrated by academically gifted learners. Yet there is something about these students that conveys latent, partially hidden, and underdeveloped high ability. They are the uncut and unpolished “diamonds in the rough” (Pfeiffer, 2013b).

Ratings by teachers on standardized instruments such as the Gifted Rating Scales (GRS) (Pfeiffer & Jarosewich, 2003) often pick up characteristics that suggest a youngster with considerable untapped potential. The following items are frequently rated by teachers as “way above average” (8 or 9 on the 9-point GRS Likert scale) for students in this third category, students with high potential to excel: learns difficult concepts easily, learns new information quickly, completes academic work unassisted, understands complex academic material, displays an active imagination, strives to achieve, works tenaciously, and takes on new and difficult tasks. Many experienced teachers are often quite perceptive and adept in identifying behaviors and attitudes observed in the classroom that indicate a youngster may have unusually high potential, as yet unrealized or untapped. Successful athletic coaches often see this same type of gifted youngster among young athletes, one with little experience or savvy for the sport but loads of untapped potential to excel if provided the right opportunity and training experiences (Pfeiffer, 2013b).

The unique challenge with the third category of gifted, those with high potential to excel, is that it is always a speculative classification. The classification is based on observational and test data, classroom and contextual information that is integrated to infer that if life circumstances had been different, the child would very likely appear as a student of high intelligence and/or a student who is an academically gifted learner. The inference is that, if given a different home and thus different familial, cultural, economic, and/or community circumstances, the child would resemble—and qualify as—a student with high intelligence and/or a student who is an academically gifted learner (Pfeiffer, 2013).
This third category of gifted also carries with it a prediction. The prediction is that if the student is provided with well-conceived, comprehensive, intensive, evidence-based psychoeducational interventions—often requiring a home component—then he or she will ultimately appear indistinguishable from, or at least very similar to, any student who is already identified as falling within one of the other two gifted categories, high intelligence or academically gifted learner. This remains a highly speculative and untested hypothesis in the gifted education field. It is, however, the principle underlying many gifted programs designed specifically for students of color and cultural diversity whose test scores don’t meet minimum school district criteria for gifted consideration (Ford & Whiting, 2008; Worrell & Erwin, 2011).

In summary, these three categories of gifted students constitute different groups of children, with different levels and profiles of abilities and different skill sets and even personality characteristics, although they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There is, of course, considerable overlap. For example, there are many students with exceptionally high IQ scores who are academically gifted learners with a burning passion to learn. This should come as no surprise to the reader.

However, there are also many extraordinarily academically gifted learners with tested IQ below 120. And there are many students with tested IQ at 130 and above who have not distinguished themselves academically in the classroom, for any number of reasons. The gifted field historically has focused considerable attention on gifted students with high intelligence but undistinguished classroom performance, often known as underachievers (Pfeiffer, 2002, 2013b; Rimm, 2008).

**SHOULD WE IDENTIFY GIFTED STUDENTS?**

I conclude this part of the discussion by affirming the value and importance of gifted assessment: it provides an opportunity to identify students who will likely benefit the most from the allocation of limited (and often costly) resources to students of uncommon intellectual and academic ability—the gifted. All too often the gifted student’s academic needs are not being substantially and appropriately challenged in the classroom or school, and quite often they require specialized programs, services, or activities not ordinarily provided in the regular
classroom—not always, but frequently. The tripartite model reminds administrators, educators, psychologists, and policymakers that there are multiple ways of viewing giftedness. And as a result, there is more than one type of special program for the gifted student (Reis, 2006).

There is great value in gifted assessment. I propose an even more radical position: *gifted assessment should be recurring*. Similar to procedures used in most elite sports and performing arts selection situations, procedures for students identified as gifted in the schools should call for them to be reevaluated at least every two years to demonstrate continued outstanding performance when facing increasingly challenging academic hurdles. The assessment should also be open to students who have not been identified as gifted at an earlier time. Recurring gifted assessment represents a more valid prediction of ultimate, out-of-school, real-world success. Recurring gifted assessment also increases the base rate for success of the gifted identification enterprise from a talent development perspective (Ackerman, 2013; Pfeiffer, 2012, 2013b).

Programs for the gifted should reflect the unique learning needs of high-ability students, and should derive from the gifted literature and national and state standards and legislation (Landrum, Callahan, & Shaklee, 2001). There are many different gifted curriculum models and programs (Dixon, 2009; Karnes & Bean, 2009; Rakow, 2011). Gifted assessment should always consider the type of programs, services, and/or resources offered by the school district and available in the community or online. Otherwise, gifted assessment is an intellectual exercise that may lead only to the cherished label of “gifted” for a child—one often sought after by many parents but otherwise not leading to any real, beneficial outcome or change in the curriculum or instruction for the child. When gifted assessment (and gifted classification) is linked to a quality gifted program—often marked by an academically rigorous and more challenging and fast-paced curriculum with high-order analytical and critical thinking skills and hands-on discovery learning (Berger, 2008; Pfeiffer, 2013b)—there follows the potential for real benefit to the youngster and society. Many children in the top 5, 10, and even 20% of the intelligence distribution will have a huge and disproportionately large influence on our culture, economy, institutions, and quality of life in the future. In essence, our future depends in large measure on how successfully we identify and educate our next generation of gifted students.

**PURPOSES OF GIFTED ASSESSMENT**

Up to this point, we have focused on *gifted assessment as a means of identifying high-ability students*, as evidenced by uncanny intellectual abilities, outstanding
classroom performance, or evidence of potential for outstanding academic performance. The primary rationale for gifted identification is to recognize and serve those students of exceptional ability or potential who frequently need special educational programs or resources not presently available in the regular classroom. This remains the number one purpose for gifted assessment in the schools. However, there are other reasons for gifted assessment, including the following:

- Providing information to support admission to special schools or gifted programs
- Understanding the unique strengths and weaknesses (asynchronies) of an exceptionally bright child or ascertaining the degree of giftedness
- Assessing growth in areas such as creativity or critical thinking with implications for curriculum modification, student “fit” within a gifted program, and program evaluation
- Assisting in the diagnosis of twice exceptionality
- Discerning factors potentially contributing to underachievement and/or low motivation
- Providing information on homeschooling
- Determining appropriate grade placement and/or making decisions about acceleration

We turn next in Chapter 2 to different conceptions of giftedness and how these conceptions can lead to different, although not necessarily incompatible, ways to assess giftedness.

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**TEST YOURSELF**

1. There is a genetic influence in the expression of giftedness:
   
   a. True
   
   b. False

2. The author’s definition of giftedness explicitly excludes mention of culture to reinforce the idea that giftedness is culture-free:
   
   a. True
   
   b. False

3. The author contends that academically gifted students are likely to benefit from special educational programs or resources that align with their unique profile of abilities and interests:
   
   a. True
   
   b. False

(continued)
4. Lewis Terman identified youngsters with IQ test scores at or above 120 in selecting the group of gifted children that he followed:
   a. True
   b. False

5. James Gallagher pointed out that we spend very little money in the United States to support gifted students in the schools:
   a. True
   b. False

6. The author disputes the view that the concept of gifted is a social construction:
   a. True
   b. False

7. The tripartite model of giftedness consists of three parts: intelligence, creativity, and motivation:
   a. True
   b. False