



Nebraska Department of Education

300 Centennial Mall South ♦ Lincoln, Nebraska ♦ 68508

High Ability Learning

March 2021

Casting a Wide Net: Maximizing Gifted Assessment



One of the questions I get most often is: Is our identification system good? Identification systems for gifted programming are a hotly debated topic, and everyone is searching for the “silver bullet” to solve the issues surrounding identification. While there is not one perfect system, there are over one hundred years of

research to guide best practices. Conceptions of giftedness have evolved over time to inform what should be current practices. As mentioned in *Essentials of Gifted Assessment* by Steven Pfeiffer (2015), “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 failed.” Although current conceptions have moved toward domain-specific models and talent development, most programs still place a heavy emphasis on general intelligence and a high global IQ score (Pfeiffer, 2015). This can create an exclusive system of identification, especially for students from underrepresented populations, students with domain-specific talents, and twice-exceptional students. When we equivocate IQ with giftedness, we discount the multiple kinds of intelligences, assumed intelligence is fixed, and do not take intelligent behaviors and creative productivity into account (Renzulli & Delcourt, 2018). With this in mind, we can create systems that cast wide nets to examine the most students. In this edition, I have put together a few examples of pathways to identification. It should be noted that these are meant to be used as PART of a system. Each individual pathway should NOT be the only way to HAL identification. These are also just examples. They may not be appropriate for every district or circumstance. Take them as a way to digest current research through examples! As always, contact me if you have questions.

Sheyanne Meadows



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HAL Spotlight: Melissa Frans

The purpose of the HAL Spotlight is to allow you to connect and meet your counterparts across the state. Feel free to reach out to one another! Establishing a cohesive network is super important, and it reminds us that we all have one common goal—serving HAL students.

The educator in the spotlight this month is Melissa Frans. Ms. Frans is new to the HAL world, but she is a learner and a champion for equity. She has been working hard to ensure equitable identification systems in her school to increase the number of students from diverse background. Ms. Frans has been dedicated to gaining knowledge of best practices and filling gaps when needed. She is an excellent person for bouncing ideas and brainstorming!



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How long have you been in this position? *One year*

What is your favorite part about working with High Ability Learners?

My high ability learners often have different ways of solving problems than what I have written down on my answer keys, and they almost always bring different perspectives to our discussions. My goal is to stretch their thinking, and they are always stretching my thinking.

What are some challenges you have faced working with HALs?

Oftentimes, solutions to the problems I ask students to discuss/solve are not recognized or discovered immediately or easily, and students are unsure of how to respond when they are confused or frustrated. Teaching students how to productively struggle and navigate unknowns without too much help is a challenge.

What are some of your fears for the school year?

Educating all stakeholders about high ability learning is my responsibility, and my fear is that I am missing important stakeholders - there are people in our community that need to learn more about what I am doing, and I know I am not giving them the information they need.



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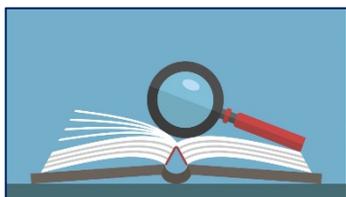
What is something you would like to tell other HAL people across the state? Is there any advice or anything you would like to say?

I'm fairly new to the HAL world - when I taught math and English, I partnered with our HAL teacher, but I rarely developed anything on my own. I often get overwhelmed with what I should know and what I need to learn. I remind myself daily that it is okay to know what I know today, but tomorrow I need to know a little more. (I stole this thought from my superintendent - his mantra is very similar and has the same goal - we should always be learning and growing.)

What do you like to do in your free time?

In my free time, I like to spend time with my family. I have a husband that loves cooking, and two young boys that love reading, asking questions, and being active.

Definitions: The Most Important Component of an Identification System



Definitions of giftedness are a crucial part of all systems. Without a definition, identifying and serving would not have a solid foundation. Definitions are used to facilitate decision-making and are often operational or conceptual in nature. Because definitions are variable, often even just between schools, it can be difficult creating consistency in identification and programming. A strong definition can be the difference in a program, so it is crucial to establish a common definition that can provide direction and develop a system (Clarenbach & Eckert, 2018).

For the purposes of this newsletter, we will use the definition as it is stated in Nebraska Rule 3:

“Learner with high ability means a student who gives evidence of high-performance capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, or artistic capacities, or specific academic fields and who requires accelerated or differentiated curriculum programs in order to develop those capabilities fully.”

When developing a definition for your context, it is important to think of the following:

- What is the PURPOSE of gifted assessment? (i.e. provide services, assisting diagnosis of 2E, etc.)
- Consider available programming. Ultimately, you should only identify the areas in which you have the capacity to serve.
- Consider the demographics of your school or district to tailor the definitions to fit your needs.

(Pfeiffer, 2015)



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Sign Up for the HAL Parent and Family Forum!



The poster features a teal header with four stylized human figures. Below it is a dark blue section with the Nebraska Department of Education logo and the text 'HAL FAMILY FORUM PARENTS & FAMILIES WELCOME'. A yellow section at the bottom says 'Join us on Zoom!' and 'Register at: http://bit.ly/2OKjxaW'. An orange vertical bar on the right contains the date 'APRIL 22, 2021' and time '6:00-7:00 PM' with a small icon of two figures at the bottom.

NDE will be hosting a HAL Family Forum! Similar to the HAL Educator Forum, the goal is to allow families of HAL students to meet and share their experiences in order to glean ideas, make connections, and feel as if they are not alone.

Parents and families of HAL students need this time to create a network of support, learning, and understanding. Through a series of breakout room with guided questions and moderators, participants will get the chance to interact with other HAL families and discuss their similar and differing experiences regarding time in and out of school.

This forum will be held via Zoom on April 22nd from 6:00-7:00 pm (CST). Please share this information with your parent networks, and feel free to attend if you have a HAL student! It is always nice to be able to take off your educator hat and be a parent. Register [here!](http://bit.ly/2OKjxaW)

Eligibility Criteria: How Do We Know?

Deciding the eligibility criteria for entrance into a HAL program is a difficult task. For these identification system examples, the procedures have been put into place, but the eligibility criterion have been intentionally left vague. Each system should define what entrance into a program would require for their school. One approach that is being intentionally avoided is the matrix approach. According to Moon (2018), there are many pitfalls to using matrices, including creating multiple hurdles instead of multiple criteria, misuse of test weighting, arbitrary cut-off scores, and not aligning the identification with the definition of giftedness being used. While it is controversial, Moon (2018) suggests using cut-off scores in order to formally establish a program and allow access to services.



It should be noted that these scores are flexible and should be used to fit the needs of the school. Additionally, it is important to caution against using a single score or placing weight on the target instrument scores. Moon (2018) reiterates this point and reminds us that we should be developing complete profiles of students and using a placement committee to discuss all data sources to ensure balanced assessment.



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Identification Procedures: A Three-Pronged EXAMPLE

While many matrices used in gifted assessment consider these multiple criterion, they tend to place an amount of emphasis on an IQ test that create hurdles for those who do not have a high global intelligence (Moon, 2018). This system is designed to give equal opportunity to all data points, including rating scales, test results, and other performances. Pfeiffer (2015) suggests, "Measures of motivation, learning style, and attitudes toward learning, achievement, and competition can be useful adjunctive data, even among young high ability learners...multiple measures should include assessment of domain-specific skills, along with measure of general cognitive ability" (p. 53). Based on the research, we know that gifted students do not always test well, and students from underrepresented populations and low SES do not test as well as their counterparts (McBee, Peters, Waterman 2014). For this reason, there are multiple pathways for entrance into the gifted program. The following system is based on a three-pronged approach (NOTE: This is ONE system with THREE ways to be identified):

Pathway 1:

Universal Screening – Phase 1

- Each year, every 3rd grade student will take the universal screener, The Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). Students who score at or above the 85th percentile based on local norms will continue to the next phase of identification. As mentioned by DiPerna (2003, as cited in Brodersen, Brunner & Missett, 2018) the CogAT yields composite verbal, non-verbal, and quantitative scores and measures general abstract reasoning. On Form 6, the reliability estimates were all .90 or above. Additionally, using national norms may cause disproportionality of identification of students with differing racial and ethnic backgrounds (Peters et. al, 2019). Because performance differs wildly from school to school based on geography, demographics, etc., using building-level norms allows each school to identify the top percentage of students in that context, allowing more access for students (Peters et. al, 2019).

Data Collection – Phase 2

By collecting data on the student, we are able to have a more complete picture of the student before making a determination for gifted programming. Pfeiffer (2015) recommends that educators collect data from multiple perspectives, including parents, other teachers, and those involved with the student outside of school (p.53). The following protocol will be followed:

- The classroom teacher completes the Characteristics of Giftedness/Creativity Checklist and Observation Forms.
- The student completes an Interest Inventory and Self-Assessment of Strengths.
- The parents complete an Observation Form and work with the student to submit any extracurricular achievements or activities (4H, FFA, Quiz Bowl, etc.).
- The teacher/other team member collects information such as MAP scores, achievement test data, grades, etc. An individual IQ test may be administered at this time.

Group Determination – Phase 3

- The gifted facilitators, administrators, and classroom teachers review the portfolio and determine admittance into the gifted program.
- If a student has been selected to participate in the program, the gifted facilitator will meet with the classroom teacher to discuss what interventions have been tried and determine the MTSS tier in which the services would be appropriate for the student.

Pathway 2:

Teacher Recommendation/Data Collection – Phase 1

In a study by Farkas and Duffett (2008), they found 65% of teachers reported that they received little to no preparation for meeting the needs of students who met grade-level expectations in their pre-service programs. One of the most impactful things we can do is ensure that teachers who see students have an understanding of what giftedness is, characteristics of giftedness, and



differing manifestations of giftedness. Teachers are often the gatekeepers into gifted programs, so this education is critical. It becomes even more critical when thinking about students from underrepresented populations. As stated by Ford & Webb (1994), "The lack of a sound knowledge base about their students' cultural backgrounds and learning styles decreases the likelihood that teachers will adequately identify, or recommend for identification and assessment" (p. 363). After professional development about the characteristics of gifted students, teachers can be one of the best resources for identifying students. This pathway shall follow the below protocol:

Teacher Referral – Phase 1

- If a teacher would like to recommend a student for the gifted program, they will fill out the Teacher Recommendation Form. This includes their most recent grades and MAP scores.
- The student completes an Interest Inventory and Self-Assessment of Strengths.
- The parents complete an Observation Form and work with the student to submit any extracurricular achievements or activities (4H, FFA, Quiz Bowl, etc.). An individual IQ test may be administered at this time.

Group Determination – Phase 2

- The gifted facilitators, administrators, and classroom teachers review the portfolios and determine admittance into the gifted program.
- If a student has been selected to participate in the program, the gifted facilitator will meet with the classroom teacher to discuss what interventions have been tried and determine the MTSS tier in which the services would be appropriate for the student.

Pathway 3:

Talent spotting is a research-based method for identifying underrepresented populations in gifted education (Horn, 2015). Talent spotting is predicated on the "you have to teach it to see it" philosophy. Exposing learners to higher-level content that they may not have been exposed to otherwise brings out thinking skills and displays of potential that may be missed if they have not been provided with those opportunities. Talent development has emerged as one of the more recent conceptions of giftedness. Talent development, as defined by Rena Subotnik (2009), "talent development as the transformation of abilities into competencies, competencies into expertise, and expertise into outstanding performance or seminal ideas" (p. 155). With this idea in mind, Horn started the Young Scholars Program in Fairfax, Virginia. In short, model lessons that test critical thinking and higher-order skills are taught and used throughout the school year. The teacher identifies students that they see as rising to the challenge or working on an advanced level, and they are put into enrichment. The enrichment consists of more challenging material, and those students who continue to perform are then moved into more intensive interventions and tested for gifted programming (Horn, 2015). While all the findings from this study are impressive, some stand out, such as a 565% increase in Black and Hispanic students receiving gifted services in high school. Using this method will help find those students who may not be identified through a more traditional method. While the Young Scholars model is a large shift, this identification system focuses on the small changes that can be made to improve assessment, so this has been adapted to a smaller scale. The pathway will use the following protocol:

Talent Spotting – Phase 1

- Twice a quarter, the gifted facilitator will go into a general education classroom (grades 2-6) and deliver a pre-written lesson that is above grade-level and requires high levels of critical thinking.
- The classroom teacher will have a checklist and notes sheet. The teacher will note which students show high levels of interest, potential in their critical thinking skills, or exceptional skills that are above that of their peers.



CORE – Phase 2

- The teacher will compile a list of students that they believed to have displayed potential during the talent spotting lesson. These students will be entered into MTSS CORE Tier services.
- After the teacher has had time to observe and collect data on the performance of the student, if they see the student thriving within the CORE interventions, they can recommend them for the gifted program.
- If the student is struggling with the advanced content, the teacher may phase the student out of the higher-level material that they do not feel is appropriate.

Data Collection – Phase 3

- If a teacher would like to recommend a student for the gifted program, they will fill out the Teacher Recommendation Form. This includes their most recent grades and MAP scores.
- The student completes an Interest Inventory and Self-Assessment of Strengths.
- The parents complete an Observation Form and work with the student to submit any extracurricular achievements or activities (4H, FFA, Quiz Bowl, etc.). An individual IQ test may be administered at this time.

Group Determination – Phase 4

- The gifted facilitators, administrators, and classroom teachers review the portfolios and determine admittance into the gifted program.
- If a student has been selected to participate in the program, the gifted facilitator will meet with the classroom teacher to discuss what interventions have been tried and determine the MTSS tier in which the services would be appropriate for the student.

Again, I would like to emphasize that this is an EXAMPLE of system based on best-practices in a perfect world. This is NOT a requirement, nor is it the only correct system of identification.

Keep in Touch!



I am SO appreciative of all the AMAZING work that is going on in the state! I always love to stay in touch about what's going on in your schools and how I can help! Feel free to drop me an email to ask questions, give suggestions, or just to say hi 😊

Thank you all!

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