

# GIFTED EDUCATION

## EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

Mary was also renowned for her insights into gifted learners and their education. She served on the national board for Gifted and Talented Education for many years.

She was also instrumental in defining qualification standards for gifted programs, for defining the goals of those programs, and, most particularly, for addressing the important relationship between the standards of qualification and the content goals of the programs.

SOI and gifted education have long been associated together. Both came into prominence at about the same time, and SOI has been variously used in gifted programs ever since.

When Mary was a school psychologist, she often had the responsibility of testing students who had been nominated for the gifted program. The test of choice in those days was the Stanford-Binet, an individual intelligence test. Only about one-half of the nominated students were passing the test at the state-mandated level.

The school administration was asking why the recommendation-to-qualification ratio was so low. Mary soon realized that teachers were recommending their "bright" students.

They were particularly adept at assimilating new materials being presented, alert, among the first to comprehend the subject matter, and had a good academic profile.

On the other hand, the Stanford-Binet test, even though it yielded a single IQ score, was purposely designed to test a wide range of intellectual processing, including problem-solving, Symbolic

content, Figural content, as well as semantic content. So the testing did not map 100% onto the academic profile that the teachers were using in their nominations.

This was a first-hand experience which helped form Mary's perspective on the relevance of multi-faceted intelligence in education. With guidance from the Structure of Intellect theory, she was able to pursue the question of why so many "bright" students were not testing as gifted.

She analyzed the Stanford-Binet item-by-item to determine which Structure of Intellect abilities each item was testing. Then, by applying the resulting template to the students' tests, she could provide an explanation as to why they did or did not succeed in the testing.

This was an improvement over coming back with a single IQ score: "John made a 128 on the test." The teacher and parents wanted to know why he did not make the cutoff.

While the template analysis allowed Mary to provide some explanation, she realized that a Structure of Intellect test would provide more precise information. This was a major impetus to developing the SOI-Learning Abilities test.

## SOI QUALIFICATION FOR THE GIFTED

Shortly after the SOI test was fully developed, it became recognized as one of the selection criteria for the gifted programs. Since the SOI tests a wide spectrum of abilities, the selection process was considerably expanded. It brought students with profiles beyond the typical "academic achiever" into the gifted programs.

This was a welcome circumstance because the policy-makers for gifted education were trying

to distinguish giftedness from high academic achievement. The two were obviously closely related, but there was an effort to recognize giftedness as distinct from purely academic performance. SOI provided an instrument for that distinction.

## SOI AND THE NEAR-GIFTED

A dilemma for gifted programs are the students who miss the testing qualification by one or two points – facing the parents of a student who got a 128 on a test requiring 130 for admission into the program.

On one hand, 2 points seems like a trivial difference for such an important decision. On the other hand, there needs to be some steadfast criterion. Otherwise, everyone would want an exception, and then where do you draw the line, and once you draw a new line, you have the same problem - slightly displaced.

There would seem to be no escaping the horns of the dilemma – the criterion must be maintained, and the parents would be very unhappy with the consequences of a trivial difference. This was the impetus for a very successful SOI program. We proposed a special SOI program for the near-gifted.

The criterion for giftedness on an SOI test is the number of test scores in the eighth and ninth stanines. Whenever students miss the cutoff by one or two subtests, it is possible to specify how they failed, and, more importantly, how they can use SOI training to improve those abilities for any future testing.

This proved to be a welcome complement to the gifted program. It not only helped to placate the parents of the near-gifted, but, in the larger perspective of the program, served to produce more gifted students.

## SOI TRAINING AS GIFTED CURRICULUM

When gifted education became a funded program, many states required the recipient schools to create a gifted curriculum that was different from school

academics. Specifically, they required a curriculum that was qualitatively different from the regular classroom.

To satisfy this requirement, some schools adopted a program of SOI training. The rationale for this program was to make gifted students into more well-rounded individuals.

As one might expect, most students who qualified for gifted programs were extremely proficient in traditional school tasks and had developed the “school” learning abilities – Cognition, Memory, and coNvergent Production, especially in seMantics – to a gifted level.

But, other aspects of their learning profiles – Evaluation, creativity, and Figural abilities – were weak by comparison.

To make these students more well-rounded individuals, which would help them in their lives beyond public schooling, SOI developed a program of individual enhancement. Based on their test profiles, we constructed individual SOI training programs focused on bringing their neglected abilities closer to the gifted level.

This program became a prototype for SOI individualized training, which applies the same enhancing strategy to all students.

## GIFTED SELECTION CRITERIA

SOI tests have standard criteria for selecting 3%, 5%, 7%, and 10% of the population. These criteria are not based on an overall test score – that amalgamation would defeat the purpose of a multi-faceted test. Instead, the criteria are based on the number of subtests for which the student obtained either an eighth or a ninth stanine score.

This process retains the separation among abilities, so identified areas of giftedness will not be diminished

by poor performance in non-gifted areas.

For example, on the form CR (with 26 subtests) the 3% cutoff for fifth grade requires nine scores in the 9<sup>th</sup> stanine. In other words, the other fourteen scores are irrelevant to the identification of giftedness. They are not irrelevant to the students' overall development.

## **CREATIVITY TESTING**

Some schools use the SOI Creativity Short Form – three tests extracted from the CR test – to supplement their selection process. This test is normed from grade two to adult. It is one of the very few tests available to gifted programs wanting to include a creativity component.

## **SOI ABILITIES TRAINING**

Schools that use the Form CR as a selection test have a special insight into defining the gifted programming following selection.

Students who are prime candidates for the gifted program are not gifted in areas that are not emphasized in the standard curriculum. Typically, they will have ignored or avoided whole areas of learning. They have succeeded in the standard academia, but their abilities in content application – Evaluation, creativity, and Figural content – have not been developed to the degree of their academic achievement.

Training these application abilities can be an essential part of a gifted program that aims to develop well-rounded students who will be better equipped to meet the intellectual challenges beyond schooling. SOI personalized workbooks and computer modules offer them this opportunity.