A Means, Not an End: Gifted Identification

Mary Ruth Coleman, Ph.D.
Senior Scientist
FPG Child Development Institute
“End” vs. “Means”

- “End” focuses on just identification, with little attention to supports and services
- “Means” secures appropriate services and the path to supporting student growth
Problems Faced in the Identification Process

1. Disproportionate representation
2. Disregard for theoretical knowledge of intelligence
3. Inappropriate use of statistical formulas and measures
4. Mismatch between identifications and services
Disproportionate (Under)Representation

- Educationally vulnerable students (often underachieving in school settings):
  - Culturally/linguistically diverse
  - Economically disadvantaged
  - Students with disabilities
The underrepresentation of these populations is inverse to their overrepresentation in special education

Related to persistent achievement gap

Impacted by policy, practice, values, and beliefs
Disregard for Theoretical Knowledge of Intelligence

- Multifaceted  not  Unitary
- Developmental  not  Fixed at birth
- Dynamic  not  Static
Inappropriate use of Statistical Formulas and Measures

- Use of cut scores (range, SD)
- Use of additive formulas that disregard scale differences
- Use of normative scores that do not reflect the population (e.g. underrepresent children of poverty and/or those with disabilities)
- Use of inappropriate measures
Mismatch between Identification and Services

- Verbal measures → math services
- IQ cut points → general enrichment

**Range of supports and services need to reflect the students’ needs!**
Best Practices for Appropriate Identification

- Multiple types of information
- Multiple sources of information
- Multiple time periods
Multiple Types of Information

- Appropriate Standardized Tests (abilities, achievement)
- Authentic Assessments (portfolio, work samples, performance tasks)
- Observations of Potential and Student Strengths (strengths reflected across many tasks and domains)
Multiple Sources of Information

- Teacher input (current and past)
- Parents
- Students (self and peer nominations)
- Other
Multiple Time Periods

- Not “one shot”
- Recognize patterns over time
- Look across teachers and grades
All identification processes and procedures must take into account student ethnicity, language, and areas of disability.
“Hints and Clues”

**Multiple types, sources, and times do not mean multiple hurdles to jump!**
No single criterion should prevent a student’s identification

HOWEVER

Any single criterion, if strong enough, can indicate a need for services
Body-of-Evidence Approach to Showing Student Strengths

- Reflects best practices with multiple types and sources of information collected overtime
- Allows for the context of the child to be considered during identification process
- Excellent for students who may not show their strengths on standardized assessments
- Documents full range of strengths and needs so an appropriate service option match can be made
“Means,” not “End”

I.D. ↔ Services

Strengths and needs more intense and complex

Supports and services more intense and complex
Specific Issues for Disproportionate Underrepresentation of Educationally Vulnerable Students
Difference Between Identification and Recognition of Potential

- Early nurturing (preK–3)
- Recognition of potential with appropriate response
Early Nurturing of Potential

- Planned experiences
- High-end differentiation
- Enrichment opportunities for all
- Family engagement and support
Recognition of Potential with Appropriate Response

- Systematic teacher observations (what we will see that indicates “potential”)

- Scaffolded response to guide, pull, and entice students toward high-level learning (zone of proximal development)
**Recognition of potential does not mean "identification as gifted," but it does demand an appropriate educational response be made.**
How does Gifted Identification fit within an RtI approach?

- Universal supports, screening, differentiation (Tier I): Nurturing of Potential
- Targeted supports based on student needs (data driven decisions—Tier II): Responding to Strengths
- Intensive supports based on sustained strengths and needs (Tier III): Sustained Supports and Services
Keys to RtI for Gifted Students

1. Allow nurturing of potential prior to formal identification (Tiers I & II)
2. Range of support across tiers vs. one-size-fits-all
3. Use of standard protocols to respond to student strengths and needs
Keys to RtI for Gifted Students continued...

4. Data-driven decision making and progress monitoring (know, show, go)
5. Collaborative problem-solving to address student’s strengths and needs
6. Parental involvement in the process
One example of an approach for early nurturing, recognition, and response to giftedness
To support teachers in the early recognition and nurturing of potential in children from economically disadvantaged and/or culturally diverse families and in children with disabilities in order to provide them with access to advanced educational opportunities and to improve their academic achievement.
To provide environments which nurture the intellectual and emotional wellbeing of young children (grades K–3).
To recognize children with outstanding potential who may be overlooked due to poverty, cultural/linguistic differences, and/or disabilities.
To engage families in meaningful ways that support their child’s academic success.
To support the use of high quality science instruction for young children (grades K–3) as a platform to recognize and respond to potential.
To respond to students’ strengths by providing appropriately challenging advanced educational experiences.
Five Components of U-STARs~PLUS
(Using-Science Talents and Abilities to Recognize Students ~ Promoting Learning for Underrepresented Students)

- High-End Learning Environments
- Teachers’ Systematic Observations
- Hands-On/Inquiry-Based Science
- Systemic Change
- Family and School Partnership
Teachers are better able to recognize culturally/linguistically diverse children with high-potential

Teachers are more confident in their ability to meet the needs of children within their classrooms.

Teachers use more differentiated instructional strategies.

 Teachers provide more hands-on science, integrating reading and math!
Families feel more confident that teachers understand their child and are working to meet their child’s needs.

Family engagement and involvement in school activities increases.

Children in U–STARS~PLUS schools report being significantly happier than children in comparison schools!
Tiered Services, Universal Screening/Progress Monitoring, Family Partnerships, Focused Instructional Strategies, Regular Ed and AIG partnerships

- Tier 1: Whole-Class TOPS, regular classroom centered, high-end learning environment, nurture/response, family partnerships
- Tier 2: Regular Ed and Gifted Ed partnership, flexible grouping, Individual TOPS, recognition of outstanding potential, focused differentiation, family partnerships
- Tier 3: Targeted services, Gifted Ed teacher more involved to provide appropriate response and service, continued family partnerships, possible nomination for formal gifted identification
Other Models in Gifted Education

Fit with RtI and offer evidence–based approaches:
- Schoolwide Enrichment (Renzulli & Reis)
- Autonomous Learner (Betts)
- Problem–based Learning (Van Tassel–Baska)
- Curriculum Approaches (William & Mary)
Get Serious about Reducing Underrepresentation

- Start early with nurture, recognize, respond
- Engage families in partnerships that support learning
- Take a hard look at patterns across student groups, schools, and classrooms
- Review policies to ensure that barriers do not exist
- Communicate intent clearly and recognize and reward successes
Get Serious about Reducing Underrepresentation

- Build an infrastructure for change (professional development, policy, technical assistance, accountability)
- Examine funding sources and structures (not a “zero sum” approach): Title I, AP, content areas, etc.
- Create a continuous improvement approach to change
- Realize that this is a long–term commitment to achieving excellence of all students
Questions for Discussion

- How does this fit with current philosophy and practice?
- What does your data show as being your critical needs?
- What difficulties and challenges will need to be addressed in the change process?
- What benefits or outcomes would make this worthwhile?
If appropriate identification is the “means,” what is the “end”? 