Indicators concerning the gifted population in the educational system[(*)]

Dr. Inbal Shani
The Center for Interdisciplinary Research of Emotions, University of Haifa

At first blush, the goals of gifted education appear to be readily apparent. Gifted students, by way of their identification and selection, are held to be endowed with high levels of cognitive ability. Accordingly, it seems quite natural to posit that a key objective for educating the gifted is assuring that their full potential is realized. If indeed this is the case, indicators in gifted education should be tailored to gauge whether or not gifted programs, in fact, contribute to the full realization of the intellectual potential of this selected target group.

Although striving for full utilization of the academic potential of gifted students in not controversial, per se, there still appears to be some ambiguity about what is actually meant by 'realizing one's full potential' and how this may best be achieved. In fact, operationally defining terms such as 'intelligence' and 'giftedness,' is no mean task. Thus, a number of different operationalizations are found in the literature, allowing us to extrapolate different ways for identification and education of the gifted from these variegated definitions.

 In the present review I was guided by a multidimensional perception of giftedness. This approach appears to be congenial to the trend in the contemporary literature to move away from unidimensional perceptions of giftedness toward multidimensional models. A multidimensional perspective of giftedness may impact upon both the identification and education of gifted students, and more broadly, the goals of the gifted education on the national level and the nature of the suggested indicators in this area.

This review is based on three main sources of information: (a) An extensive review of the literature (archival research literature, websites of key centers for the gifted, professional material sent to me by international scholars, etc.); (b) Meetings with leaders in the area of giftedness in Israel; and (c) correspondence with leading researchers in gifted education and research.

Under the rubric of a description of gifted education in Israel and the theoretical and empirical changes in giftedness definition, I review major indicators in gifted education, which may be conveniently divided into three main categories: (a) pre-identification indicators, (b) indicators for identification of giftedness, and (c) indicators for educational programs. This is followed by a discussion of affective indicators for gifted students. In the final section of this report, I detail my suggestion

---

[(*)]The Initiative for Applied Research in Education's *The Expert Committee on Guidelines for Revising the System of Education Indicators in Israel* commissioned the scientific survey.
– The findings are in the author's own words and the conclusions reached are his own.
– Any mention or quote from the survey must be referenced in the following manner: Shani I. (2008), Indicators concerning the gifted population in the educational system, a Survey Commissioned by the Expert Committee on Guidelines for Revising the System of Education Indicators in Israel.
http://education.academy.ac.il/English/

for the establishment of a national data base of gifted students, as well as future directions for research and thinking in the area of indicators for gifted education.

Pre-identification. One of the recommended implementations in the research literature is to use multiple criteria in the identification process of the gifted, which can be realized by the use of teacher recommendations at the pre-identification stage. Why teachers? For one, teachers have an ongoing, almost day-to-day, interaction with their students. Thus, they are able to best assess and compare different facets of students' abilities and talents. This close acquaintance with potentially talented individuals is quite congenial with the broad conception of defining and identifying gifted individuals. In this sense, teachers can serve as a preliminary screening system. However, impressions and subjective evaluations of teachers can be quite erroneous. It is important, therefore to develop validated measures that teachers in the educational system may use in identifying gifted students during the first stage of the process. The aim here is to develop a preliminary screening procedure based on teachers' ratings, accompanied by validated measures. For example, such a measure entitled the *Gifted Rating Scale* (GRS), was recently developed by Pfeiffer, and was validated in different countries throughout the world

Identification. Traditionally, the identification of gifted students was based mainly on ability tests, and was aimed at assessing the intellectual competencies of the student. The multidimensional conception of giftedness is striving to transform the nature of existing indicators, including both their quantity and diversity. Accordingly, instead of applying only one criterion– a measure of general intellectual ability, multiple criteria, assessing specific intellectual competencies, should be employed. In accordance with that view, the identification process in Israel is facing the challenge of by adding measures of motivation, creativity and diverse intellectual abilities to the process. The *'Aurora Project'*, based on the theory of Successful Intelligence, is showcased as a broad identification process, which is recommended as a potential model. This project demonstrates the change toward the broad perception of giftedness by referring to three kinds of intellectual skills (creative, analytic and practical).

Gifted education. The identification process based on diverse measures, along with the broad view of giftedness, requires the development of variety of programs, in order to better address the diversity of talents in this special population. Therefore, a pivotal role for indicators of educational programs is to assess the links between the identification process, on one hand, and the education processes, on the other. Furthermore, broadly speaking, educational program indicators need to assess the degree to which programs for the gifted contribute to the full realization of the different aspects of students' intellectual potential. However, it appears that worldwide there is little empirical research about the effectiveness of gifted programs, with few scientific publications in that area. The situation is similar in the Israeli scene. The number of program evaluation studies is scant and the few existing published studies rely mainly on measures of students' and teachers' satisfaction, which does not necessarily reflect aspects of potential realization and educational attainment. Nevertheless, there is a broad agreement concerning the urgent need for such assessments. The review presents a number of suggestions for the development of indicators in that area through questionnaires and focus group.

Affective facets of giftedness. The affective aspects of giftedness and gifted education are of great importance, not only for the students' well being and feeling of self realization, but also for the utilization of his/hers intellectual abilities. One the one hand, the utilization of the intellectual ability relies, to a large extent, on affective

competencies-- such as motivation, self- concept, etc. On the other hand, success in the cognitive and educational domains fosters positive feelings in the affective area. However, the literature examining the affective and personality development of socio-emotional characteristics in gifted children and youth has a long and checkered history, often involving heated debate between the advocates of two polar positions. The first stance supports the notion that intellectually gifted students, in view of their superior cognitive and intellectual resources, are expected to show normative or superior psychosocial adjustment compared to their non-gifted. The second stance maintains that intellectually gifted students are particularly vulnerable and at risk for the development of social and emotional problems as a result of their unique characteristics such as asynchronous development, negative labeling, feeling of being different and high parental expectations. Today, in Israel, there are no systematic large-scale studies of the affective profile, problems, and difficulties of gifted students. In addition, there are only few experts – psychologist, counselors or educators, specializing in the affective field of gifted education. Systematic, reliable and validated assessment of the affective outcomes of giftedness will enable more effective counseling, and should be useful at the individual level (helping the gifted students become aware of his emotional strengths and weaknesses) as well as in the group level (developing class projects, improving class climate, etc.). The affective indicators should focus on two levels – a broad questionnaire assessment designed to reveal the specific emotional and social characteristics of the gifted students, followed up, if need be, by clinical assessment by experts.

National database. Gifted education would preferably rely on periodic, repeated, and systematic, assessment of gifted students in the educational system, followed up by studies tracking their post-school progress and development. An establishment of a national database centering on the gifted reflects a broad and comprehensive approach towards the work of the educational system with gifted students. Such a broad database concerned with gathering systematic data on a specific focal group, is normative in different fields. It fosters research on the target reference group, as well as making a useful contribution via the data it reveals. The suggestion of establishing a national database was first raised by the Nevo Committee. The current review strongly supports this suggestion and further elaborates its components and the stages need to be taken for its implementation.

Future directions. The multidimensional conception of giftedness served as the heuristic framework for suggesting a number of directions and possible future trends for research and development in the field of identification and education of the gifted, and for construction of relevant indicators. In the closing chapter, the report deals with those new directions, currently under preliminary research. The focus is on the development of novel indicators to be developed as a result of the development in the field of gifted education.