THE VALIDITY OF TEACHER NOMINATION OF PUPILS FOR INCLUSION IN A GIFTED PROGRAMME IN "INDIAN" SCHOOLS.

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A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION - DIVISION OF SPECIALISED EDUCATION - UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG - TOWARDS THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION (EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY).

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the validity of teacher nomination of pupils for inclusion in a gifted programme in "Indian" schools. Correlations between teacher nominations and the Renzulli Rating Scale (RRS) were used to test the validity of teacher nomination and highly significant correlations were found.

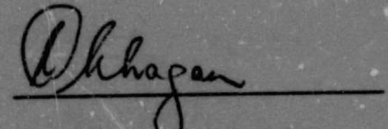
The RRS was adopted because it covered a broader, interactive, multiple criteria definition of giftedness than the more traditional, narrow, standardised measures of intelligence. As the RRS had established reliability and validity only in respect of an American context a pilot study was undertaken to validate the RRS as a test of intelligence for South African children. The pilot study correlated the intellectual category of RRS scores with scores on the Junior South African Individual Scale (JSAIS) the latter being a unidimensional measure of intelligence. Correlations obtained were highly significant suggesting that the RRS was valid as a measure of intelligence. At the same time it had the added advantage of considering other dimensions of giftedness (namely, task commitment and creativity).

The results of the correlations between the RRS and teacher nomination suggest that teacher nomination is a valid, cost effective and reliable method of

identifying gifted pupils. Further research on the viability of this method in an integrated schooling system needs to be conducted.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education (Educational Psychology) in the Division of Specialised Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.



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To Rekha

With Love.

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1.INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY.

Schools for the "Indian" population in South Africa presently fall under the House of Delegates. Through successive administrations the provision of facilities for pupils who displayed exceptional talents has largely been ignored. This has probably been as a result of the huge backlog in "Indian" education which resulted in much energy and resources being channeled towards establishing basic educational facilities.

An additional factor militating against the establishment of classes for the "gifted" has been the negative attitude of many educators. So called "gifted" children were commonly viewed as individuals who were not in need of specialized assistance as their talents assured them of an easy passage through schools. As a result, most of the budget for specialised services was allocated to the provision of support services for those pupils who experienced learning difficulties and for those who were unable to cope with the demands of the regular curriculum.

Recently, however, the attitude towards the provision of services for the "gifted" has grown more positive as the Department has become more aware of the necessity of providing facilities to meet the needs of all pupils.

Research on the effects of neglect of this important population has also served to increase the clamour from educators for the establishment of special facilities for the "gifted".

The establishment of such facilities would entail reaching a clear definition of "giftedness" and the adoption of identification procedures that would be viable, valid and cost effective.

Whilst this study is conducted within a segregated education department, it is important to analyse the findings in a manner that would transcend this segregated framework and contextualise the results within a non-racial, democratic society.

2. TOWARDS A DEFINITION

Roach and Bell (1986) state: "Defining 'gifted' is a delicate and complicated activity, made more so by the fact that there is no theoretically based definition that will fit all programmes and circumstances" (p. 1).

A survey of relevant literature supported this contention and indicated that no consensus on a single, precise definition of giftedness had been reached. Definitions reflected the particular theoretical perspective they were rooted in. A wide variety of definitions exist. They range from Terman's narrow, quantitatively precise definition of gifted persons as those who score in the top two percent on an intelligence test, to Calvin Taylor's multiple-talent definition, which assumes that most children possess special skills and talents (Roach and Bell, 1986).

For practical purposes, the first definition may be too exclusive, the second too inclusive to provide guidance for the identification process. Between these two extremes are several definitions currently in use.

A broader definition used by the American Psychological Association is quoted in Clark, 1979 (p. 3) viz:

"Gifted and talented children are referred to as children who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership capacity or specific academic skills, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities". However, in her book "Growing up Gifted" (Clark, 1983) postulates a different definition, which sees giftedness as a biologically rooted concept, that results from the advanced and accelerated integration of functions within the brain, including physical sensing, emotions, cognition and intuition.

Getzels and Jackson (1958) suggest that using a single metric (I.Q.) is far too restrictive, "thus blinding us to other forms of excellence". Robinson (1977) also deplores the exaggerated claims for the I.Q. in determining who is gifted.

Renzulli (1978) recognised the need for both inspiration and perspiration when he defined giftedness as consisting "of an interaction of three basic clusters of human traits - these clusters being above-average general abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity."

Gifted and talented children are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. Children who manifest or are capable of developing an interaction among the three clusters require a wide variety of educational opportunities and services that are not ordinarily provided through regular instructional programmes.

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Lack of agreement over the definition of giftedness hampers both the development of new instruments and the selection of existing approaches to assessment. Thus, because there is no "right" definition, "each school district must work out its own definition through study and dialogue." (Roach and Bell, 1986).

2.1 THE OPERATIONAL DEFINITION ADOPTED FOR THIS STUDY

An analysis of teachers' definitions of the concept of "giftedness" showed that the majority of them saw giftedness from a multiple-criteria perspective. It is felt that a categorical identification of giftedness at the early primary school stage is not advisable as this does not take cognisance of the interaction between inherited and acquired characteristics. Rather, the recognition of behaviour that suggests the potential for giftedness could serve as a basis for including children in an enrichment programme.

Consequently it was decided to opt for Renzulli's conceptualisation of giftedness as an operational definition for this research study as the target population is constituted by Junior Primary School pupils. In addition Renzulli (like Barbara Clark) does not view Giftedness as an abstract or inherited concept. Rather, he argues that children have the capacity to develop towards Giftedness.

3. METHODS AND MODELS OF IDENTIFICATION

There are various approaches to the identification of giftedness. One approach is rooted in the use of standardised intelligence tests administered by trained professionals, another uses tests that include dimensions other than intelligence, a third emphasizes

dynamic assessment and yet another includes the use of nominations by professionals and others as a method of identification.

Several models of identification exist. Selected models are discussed in terms of their relative impact on the procedure adopted in this study.

3.1 THE TRADITIONAL METHOD

The Traditional Method consists of, first, administering group ability tests to all pupils in those classes from which programme participants would be selected and then administering an individual intelligence test to all students whose score was above a certain level on the group test.

The heavy reliance on formal tests of intelligence in the identification of the gifted has been extensively challenged by, amongst others, Renzulli, Reis and Smith (1981); Roach and Bell (1986); Fatouros (1986); Sattler (1974). This method is time consuming and costly (Renzulli & Smith, 1977). Furthermore, group ability tests are unavoidably written tests and are therefore totally unsuitable for children in the junior primary age group (6 to 9 year olds) i.e. the target population of this study.

Martinson, (1961) and Reynolds, (1962) have established that individual intelligence tests can identify intellectually gifted children from the preschool level upwards. However, Martinson (1974) concluded that individual intelligence tests do not adequately cover such areas as creative potential, leadership ability, aesthetic production or psychomotor skills. These

tests may also penalize children with language or environment handicaps. The operational definition adopted by this study precludes a narrow emphasis on intellectual ability.

3.2 DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT MODEL

The dynamic assessment model uses techniques which "assess not only current manifest ability but ascertain what the children concerned might be capable of"(Skuy, Kaniel and Tzuriel, 1988).

This approach holds that children of low socio-economic- status (SES) have as much potential as their counterparts in the higher socio-economic status group but the deprivation of meaningful experiences has stunted the realisation of their full potential - a philosophy that is supported by the researcher. It postulates that the deprivation that characterises disadvantaged children is in fact a deprivation of "mediated learning experiences" (MLE). The model seeks to use the Learning Potential Assessment Device (LPAD, an instrument devised by Feuerstein in 1979) to ascertain the extent to which a disadvantaged person could profit from MLE.

Skuy, Gaydon, Hoffenberg and Fridjhon (1990) suggest that the LPAD might provide a generally useful approach for selection of disadvantaged children for gifted programmes. However, for optimal effectiveness the mediators need to be properly trained and experienced.

3.3 THE MULTIPLE CRITERIA METHOD

Roach and Bell (1986) suggest a multiple criteria process of identification. This approach postulates