

Rationale for the use of Questionnaires in Developing a Student Profile

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The BC Ministry of Education Gifted Students Handbook which references materials by Clark(1992), recommends that gifted students develop a profile that includes information regarding academic achievement, learning styles and strengths, interests, special abilities, and visions and goals for the future. There is a great deal of research and articles which support the idea of gifted students broadening their understanding of these areas and providing rationales for ways to collect this information.

Studies cited by Rayneri, Gerber, and Wiley (2006), indicate that underachievement in gifted students could actually be connected to a lack of understanding of a student's characteristics and needs which a profile would address. Through examining the learning styles of eighty gifted students, these authors were able to demonstrate that a student's learning style plays a role in classroom performance and persistence in completing tasks. This finding supports the need for teachers to emphasize content, processes, and products that match student's learning styles. Therefore a profile sheet and discussion when creating an IEP could inform a teacher's practice and support gifted student's performance. Rayneri, et al. also mentioned that flexible seating arrangements and kinesthetic activities were preferred by some gifted students.

Another study by Cheng (1993), supports the need for gifted students to be aware of components of their learning such as those suggested in the profile sheet, and looks at the need for supporting gifted student's development of metacognitive thinking. Cheng sorts metacognitive thinking into two components. The first component involves developing an individual's awareness of their own learning process. The second component Cheng identifies is the individual's ability to regulate their cognitive resources and strategies to complete a task. In completing questionnaires designed to identify learning styles and preferences for learning content, process and products as well as identifying individuals affective states, the groundwork is laid to increase an individual's awareness of their learning. As Cheng points out, gifted students are often superior to their age peers in their metacognitive ability and would benefit from specific strategy instruction to maximize their learning. Cheng's (1993) research offers support for helping gifted students become aware of their learning process through questionnaires. To build upon Cheng's research, teachers can refer to Winebrenner (2001), who offers activities, strategies and ideas for lesson plans based on students' learning styles and preferences.

Feldhusen (2001) also supports the use of developing talents in gifted youth through using rating scales for behavioural characteristics. Feldhusen makes an important point that using these scales should not be a single event. Rather, these questionnaires can be used as part of an ongoing process by which parents, teachers, and students identify how best to develop individual student's talents through creating and evaluating plans such as IEP's. Feldhusen also supports Cheng's (1993) research by making the point that questionnaires can help students develop metacognitive behaviours towards pursuing their talents.

Lastly, Lorraine Bouchard (2004) explored the use of Dabrowski's over excitabilities questionnaire. Bouchard highlights the importance of using this questionnaire by providing research indicating that this questionnaire could actually be used to identify gifted students because it correlates so highly with giftedness in some areas. Interestingly, Bouchard likens overexcitabilities to a filter through which gifted students experience the world. Uses for the overexcitabilities questionnaire include developing a student's self-awareness, which is the first step identified by Cheng (1993), in supporting metacognitive thinking. Other uses include the possibility of identifying areas of content, processes of learning, and tailoring a product to more accurately meet the learning needs of a gifted student. Articles by Lind (2001), and Strickland (2001), provided additional strategies for adapting learning processes and content based on student's overexcitabilities. Anecdotally, this questionnaire was the one that promoted the most discussion and interest among a group of grade one through five gifted students at RC Garnett Elementary.

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