

# *Gifted Development Center*

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## **Issues in Identification and Assessment**

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Assessment of the highly gifted is complex. Differences in scores obtained on various instruments are much greater for this group than for any other population. Discrepancies have been found in excess of 100 points (Silverman & Kearney, 1992b)! By comparison, there is relatively little variation in scores from test to test for average and retarded children. The culprit is **ceiling effects**, which occur when the child's knowledge goes beyond the limits of the test. None of the modern individual and group tests have items of sufficient difficulty to assess the full strength of the abilities of highly gifted students (Silverman & Kearney, 1989; 1992a).

A recent study compared IQ scores of 20 highly gifted children derived from both the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (Form L-M) and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-III (WISC-III) (Silverman & Atkinson, in preparation). These children attained scores in the 151 - 191 range on the L-M, with a mean of 173. On the WISC-III, they scored in the 116 - 150 range, with the following means: 134 Full Scale IQ, 141 Verbal IQ, and 120 Performance IQ. The highest score on the WISC-III was below the lowest score on the Binet L-M; only three of the children scored in the highly gifted range on the WISC-III, attaining Full Scale IQ scores of 146, 148 and 150.

Discrepancies ranged from 14 to 60 points (mean difference 37 IQ points)! In addition, another child was discovered who obtained an IQ score of 124 on the Kaufman-ABC (K-ABC), 137 on the WISC-R, and a year later tested 229+ on the Stanford-Binet (Form L-M) (Silverman & Kearney, 1992b).

The resolution to the problem is a two-stage process which may be costly, but is justified. The following recommendation was offered in 1989:

*Because none of the current instruments properly assess the full strength of the abilities of exceptionally gifted children, alternative methods of evaluation must be sought. In the National Report on Identification (Richert, 1982), the consensus of the national task force was as follows:*

*it was recognized that new instruments and methods need to be developed for identification of gifted students in specific populations, such as disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, students with limited English-speaking ability, exceptionally gifted students and handicapped students. (pp. 77-78, italics added)*

*This recommendation is already being implemented with all of the specific populations listed except one--the exceptionally gifted. In this case, an old method of identification is more appropriate than newer methods. Our recommendation is that when a child obtains **three** subtest scores at or near the ceiling of any current instrument, he or she should be retested on the Stanford-Binet Form L-M. (Silverman & Kearney, 1989, p. 48)*

In the last few years, this recommendation has been adopted by several psychologists who assess highly gifted children. However, when these criteria were applied to the data on the WISC-III, less than half of the highly gifted children in the sample were located (Silverman & Atkinson, in preparation). Rimm and Lovance (1992) suggested that children be retested on the Binet L-M when they attained ceiling level scores on **two** subtests.

*The Wechsler IQ tests are used for initial testing because the subtest scores are viewed as important for curriculum-related decisions. When students are at or near the ceiling score on at least two subtests, the Clinic recommends further testing using the Stanford-Binet, Form L-M. (Rimm & Lovance, 1992, p. 101)*

Using this criterion, 90 percent of the highly gifted sample were located. While the three-subtest rule appeared to be adequate for the WISC-R, it is recommended that two subtests of the WISC-III be used as the criterion for retesting.

The Binet (L-M) is also recommended if the child has a known eye-hand coordination problem, is highly reflective and a slow processor, or has difficulty with timed tests. The newer tests have substantially increased the bonus points for speed as a method of increasing reliability; if a child of 12 solves every Performance item correctly on the WISC-III but gets no bonus points for speed, he or she would score **below average** on every subtest (Kaufman, 1992).

*The biggest negatives for gifted assessment are the new emphasis on problem-solving speed on the WPPSI-R [and] the substantially increased stress on performance time in the WISC-III compared to the WISC-R... The speed factor will penalize gifted children who are as reflective as they are bright, or who tend to go slow for other non-cognitive reasons such as a mild coordination problem. (Kaufman, 1992, p. 158)*

The L-M is essentially untimed, and has few motoric demands. Therefore, it is a better instrument for children whose Verbal IQ scores are significantly higher (15 points) than their Performance IQ scores. Thirteen of the 20 children in our sample had Verbal/Performance discrepancies of 15

points or greater (15 - 44 points). One child who scored 164 on the Binet L-M obtained only a 99 on the Performance section of the WISC-III (Silverman & Atkinson, in preparation).

Reservations psychologists might have about using the old Stanford-Binet are discussed elsewhere (Silverman & Kearney, 1992a; 1992b). However, it is important to note that it is **not** "unethical" to use a dated test: Stanley E. Jones, Director of the Office of Ethics for the American Psychological Association, writes:

*It would not be my reading that Principle 2.9 would prohibit the use of any test for a purpose that can be defended. It does make it the responsibility of the psychologist to provide such a defense when using tests which are not obviously current. (personal communication to Sylvia Rimm, November 25, 1991)*

**\*Note: This material was excerpted from "Highly Gifted Children," by Linda Kreger Silverman, in J. Genshaft, M. Bireley, & C. L. Hollinger (Eds.) (1995). *Serving gifted and talented students: A resource for school personnel* (pp. 217-240). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.**

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