

Recognizing Gifted Potential in Primary Children: A Three-year Pilot and Professional Development

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The earlier gifted children experience education tailored to meet their needs, including mind-alike time with other gifted peers, the less likely they are to underachieve or become disenfranchised with school. Yet, young children and/or children from populations that differ from the general population remain underrepresented and underserved in gifted education. Children from low-income and/or minority families, who are often unidentified at an early age, are less likely to be recognized later (Moon & Brighton, 2008). Furthermore, when culturally and/or linguistically diverse gifted children are not aware of their giftedness, the pressure to assimilate into mainstream American culture at younger ages in our schools can result in them masking their gifted characteristics and being overlooked during formal identification processes (Slocumb & Payne, 2011).

Standardized intelligence testing is often used to identify giftedness, but the dilemma with such tests is that the younger the subject, the less valid the results when administered in a group. Hillsboro School District in Hillsboro, Oregon, used the Cognitive Abilities in group settings to screen all second grade children for giftedness. However, we found that with our diverse population, some students needed gifted services earlier to stay engaged in school-based learning, and some students needed evaluation with an alternative type of measure. Hillsboro's over 20,000 students are approximately 50% white, 35% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 4% Multiracial, 2% African-American, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1% Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, and 1% Other. Between 2009 and 2013, its specialized program services range as follows: 6-8% gifted students, 11-14% students with an IEP, 1-2% students on a 504 plan, 5-7.5% Migrant students, 12-14% English Language Learners, 11-13% exited ELL students, and 0.5-4% of students in a steadily growing Dual Language program.

We began searching for a more authentic, non-standardized assessment of giftedness to use with primary students. In partnership with Ann Matschiner at Pacific University, Hillsboro School District piloted Bertie Kingore's Recognizing Gifted Potential (2009), including the Kingore Observation Inventory (KOI) and some of the Planned Experiences, with first-grade students in one elementary school¹. The second year, we expanded to nine volunteer schools, and the following year, included all 25 elementary schools in our district in the process. The first-grade gifted screening process is now a district-wide practice.

TRAINING PROCEDURES

Year 1

Our first "training" session was simply an afternoon meeting with the three first grade teachers from our pilot school. We guided the group through the Kingore Observation Inventory (KOI)

Kingore, B. (2016). *The Kingore Observation Inventory* (3rd ed.). Austin, TX: PA Publishing.

process and materials. We concluded with a plan to use the KOI, administer three Planned Experiences, and interpret the results from the 76 students.

Year 2

The second year, we expanded to nine volunteer schools with a total of 571 first grade students in 20 classrooms. As project leaders, we created a single-day training with at least one teacher representative from each school, followed by a second day with participants scoring, debriefing the experience, and making recommendations for next steps with students.

Year 3

The third year, we expanded our gifted screening project to include 25 schools with a total of 1517 first grade students in 60 classrooms. We asked each school to send at least two first grade teachers to the trainings for the process. Being aware of the important role of administrative support for academic change, we invited gifted coordinators and administrators from each school to attend as well. Teachers worked in school teams and across different schools throughout the trainings in intentional and dynamic groups. In learning about the observation procedures and instructional strategies to encourage gifted behavior, we created teacher learning groups that shifted often. For some activities, teachers worked in cross-school teams to share varied perspectives and bring back new ideas to their school team. When a cohesive understanding and application was desired, participants collaborated in school teams.

Based on feedback from previous teacher participants, we organized the training into strategically scheduled half-day sessions and provided two-hour refresher sessions for previous participants. The first half-day training focused on the process and implementation of the KOI. After three weeks, we scheduled a second half-day training that allowed us to check-in with teachers about the KOI and provided time to help them work through any dilemmas

KOI TRAINING CONTENT

The following half-day training could easily be expanded to a full day or spread over time in two different sessions. Teachers would benefit from more time to digest and discuss the materials as well as select learning experiences from the KOI materials to integrate into their classrooms. All interactions and discussions employed in this training incorporate a variety of strategies to model quality instruction, such as the creation of metaphors, think-pair-share, similarity and difference statement stems for sharing understanding, the application of clarifying and probing questions in timed discussions.

Kingore Observation Inventory Training Plan

1. Welcome to Participants
2. Caption Writing Activity–Writing captions for cartoons depicting gifted students

3. Discussion: Why early identification?
 - A. When and how does giftedness manifest in different students?

Discuss age ranges, environmental catalysts, cultural differences, and types of giftedness. Ask teachers to think about a student or family member who exhibited what they perceived as gifted characteristics at a young age. Use their stories as jumping off points to clarify, demystify, and expand on giftedness.
 - B. What happens when a gifted student's needs are not met?

Gifted students are at risk for underachievement, dropping out, and/or social-emotional consequences. Clarify assimilation pressures and the masking of gifted characteristics in relationship to gender, income, ethnicity, and English Language Learners.
4. Review KOI Materials
5. What are the KOI behaviors for different populations?

Skim, think, and share in small groups. Think of former students who fit one or more categories. What did they do or say that demonstrated that trait?
6. Analytical Observation: Benefitting All Learners

Jigsaw in groups of three and discuss: How does this match your current thinking or understanding? How does this challenge your current thinking or understanding?
7. Procedures and Forms

Read, ask questions, share understanding, and clarify procedures and sample tallies.
8. Techniques and Activities to Nurture and Encourage Gifted Behaviors

Jigsaw in groups of three.. Skim and share two or three favorite differentiation and/or literature activities from the KOI materials.
9. Understanding the Categories–Explanation of Behaviors

In a group of three or four, review the characteristics. Share “I believe this is like...” statements for one or two of the seven gifted categories, until all seven have been shared. When group members have different understandings, review the descriptions to reach a consensus.
10. Practice Observations with KOI Forms

Use television and movie clips, such as Little Man Tate, Bones, Phineas and Ferb, and/or Matilda. After each video clip, compare what gifted characteristics each group member recognized. When observations differ, discuss reasons. After discussion, watch the same video clip a second time and share any new observations or changes in previous opinions.
11. Questions from Teachers

Skim and share in small groups: How does this match your current thinking/understanding? How does this challenge your current thinking/understanding?
12. KOI Overview and Review

First in small groups and then in the whole group with a speaker from each small group: review notes, ask clarifying questions, and ask probing questions.
13. Capture Your Thoughts–Reflection

The goal of training our teachers with the Kingore Observation Inventory extends beyond screening or identifying students for gifted programs and services. We believe the materials, training, and practice of observation with this methodology builds awareness in our teachers of giftedness and initiates a professional dialogue and shift in instructional practice toward best practices for gifted students.

When asked how the KOI training and classroom observation experiences impacts their teaching, one participant responded, "I will analyze by observation differently. It's more than just noting a smart answer." Another noted, "It will definitely be in the forefront of my mind now that I am more aware of the characteristics and better understand how to recognize a gifted learner." And a third teacher said of the techniques and activities to Nurture and Encourage Gifted Behaviors, "I can see myself incorporating many of these activities into my class to compliment kids' learning styles."

CONCLUSIONS

- The first-grade gifted potential screening process is now established as a district-wide practice and an integral part of Hillsboro's comprehensive gifted identification plan. In addition to the first-grade screening, all K-8 students who are individually referred to gifted testing are observed using the KOI as part of the evaluation process.
- In general, using a combination of the KOI and Planned Experiences increased the percentage of minority, ELL, migrant, dual-language and Special Education students identified as exhibiting gifted potential. Small, but steady increases were seen in each year of our initial implementation for underrepresented students.
- When teachers are trained in the process, the use of the KOI proved valid and reliable as a means to identify young children's potential for gifted performance.
- Professional development effectively built educators' awareness of the characteristics and needs of gifted students. The training increased primary teachers' implementation of gifted education best practices with their students. In addition to noticing student behaviors that may be indicative of giftedness at earlier ages, teachers are also more frequently, and earlier in the school year, incorporating higher-level thinking and open-ended activities into the daily structure of their lessons to intentionally encourage and cultivate gifted behaviors.
- Students identified as gifted received a combination the follow services to fit their needs.
 - A Personalized Education Plan, including academic and social-emotional goal setting
 - Subject-area acceleration
 - Grade-level acceleration

- Curriculum compacting
- Intentional mind-alike time with gifted peers
- Enrichment opportunities (interest area, critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving focused) both within the regular school day and as extension activities
- Counseling groups/activities with gifted peers focused on specific social-emotional needs of gifted students
- Advocacy and support from a gifted case manager, the school TAG Coordinator, in their school

After completing the entire training and implementation, a teacher reflected that she is now “more aware of the child identified and more focused and intentional in instructional challenges presented to the student.” In follow-up with students, teachers, and schools, we saw evidence of educators’ increased awareness and discussions about gifted students and how to best serve their needs. By no means were all these conversations positive, but the door was open for gifted educators and advocates to work with stakeholders to increase their understanding of giftedness and gifted children in the education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Based on our first three years of implementing this process, we recommend that all teachers administering and/or supporting gifted assessment be required to attend the trainings.
- We strongly encourage school counselors and administrators to attend the training sessions so they share the same language and understanding as the teachers.
- In the future, we recommend providing a separate and additional training for a Lead Teacher from each building to provide each school with an on-site facilitator and coach in the process.

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