

Less than a week after the board was informed about my appeal to the Tribunal, I got a call from the board. I was told that (1) the board realized that my son was very close to the criteria for the gifted identification, (2) if procedures were a little differently handled my son could have been identified as gifted and (3) the board was willing to hold an IPRC to identify him as gifted. The good news was shocking! I called my husband, the ABC SEAC at the board and my representative at the appeal board. We shared the news and joy – a victory for a pair of stubborn parents and advocates who were determined to argue about right and wrong. Yes, we missed an opportunity to voice our view on these identification criteria and we were fully aware that the funding for the gifted education is always limited. However, after so many sleepless nights, the news was sweet!

This is a long story. I was well on my way to Tribunal, the first one for this board since probably 1993. The story is about my learning process in gifted identification.

First of all, the identification for gifted children at the board is a 12-point based system. A child is automatically identified if his/her score on all three subjects of CCAT are 98% or better (4 points for each subject). If the total is one or two points away, teacher's recommendation kicks in, i.e., teacher puts names of the students against a list of gifted characteristic (10-15 out of 20 is 1 point and 15-20 out of 20 is 2 points). If the teacher's recommendation does not add any point, a student may take an achievement test such as CAT2 reading to make 2 (98%+) or 1 (95%+) point. The board thus values its identification process as a multi-criteria system.

My son, James, is currently in an English class in grade 5. Is James gifted? Here are some statistics. When he was three, with various little weights he kept a balloon in the middle of the air for almost two and half days (probably the best balloon from Blockbuster Video). When he was four, he pulled out all the core of the toilet paper rolls in the house and taped them on the wall to form a three-foot long zigzagging slant chute that could send a marble accurately into the tray at the lower end. At the end of his first term in grade 3 (EFI), evaluation at the Oxford Learning center on his "academic skills" showed that his "reading-sight vocabulary" and "oral reading" were at grade 10 level and that his "reading comprehension" and "listening comprehension" were at grade 8 level. When he took CCAT in grade 3, he was the only one in his EFI class that had scores close to the OK level, i.e., 98.9 in verbal, 92.9 in math and 91.9 in non-verbal. When he was administered WISCIII at the beginning of grade 4 (psychological clinic), the results were 99% in verbal, 97% in performance and 99% in full scale.

Does he behave at school? Yes, he does most of the time. He makes his grades most of the time. His teachers say (quoted from his report cards) that he is "a knowledgeable little boy", "enthusiastic student" and that "he motivates others with his excitement in doing tasks."

Are there special needs to be addressed in his education program? I think so. Based on his teachers (quoted from his report cards), "he is such a quick study but frequently did not listen to instructions," and he "should be able to produce assignments which truly reflect his broad base of knowledge and his ability to retain information," and

“he needs frequent reminders to listen...” To ease his boredom, he was allowed to read other books and given extra math work when he was switched to English class in grade 4.

However, he was not identified as a gifted child to address his special needs. Here is what happened.

At the beginning, my husband and I had no idea on gifted characteristics. Nonetheless, we thought the gifted program should provide James with a more challenging environment. We filled out the parent recommendation form honestly and attached with it the evaluation from Oxford Learning Centre. However, the parent view was not considered, he did not get any points from the teacher’s recommendation and his CCAT scores only added up to 8 out of the required 12 points. I was told that he could be tested again the next year.

At the beginning of grade 4, I asked the school about re-assessment and was told to take him to a psychological assessment. When I presented the school his WISCIII results, I was told that he needed one more point because each 99% (verbal and full scale) earned him 4 points while 97% in performance only earns 3 points. Since his teacher did not recommend him he was required to take CAT2 reading and to make a minimum 95% to be identified as a gifted child.

When the test was administered, he was given CAT3 reading/language set instead of CAT2 reading, although only score in reading was counted. A 40-minute test was changed into two sections of 35 minutes. He only made 89% and therefore, he was not gifted. I was disappointed and puzzled because the result was inconsistent with all his other reading scores. We went in to see what kind of test it was. The level of the test was level 14 instead of level 13, which is normally given in the fall of grade 4. Because his test was level 14, he used a “U-score” answer sheet so that the teacher could hand-mark the test. The “U-score” format should be used only for level 14 and above. We found all these based on the online information at the test centre. We complained but we heard nothing.

By that time, James started getting bad marks on his quizzes because the teacher didn’t like his “6” or “h” or ... He was bothered by being paired up forever with a classmate known to have learning problems. He was also bothered by some incidents; for example, his teacher laughed loudly on an error he made in the dictation and the whole class got a good laugh out of it. I was devastated. The only thing close I could think of was the bright Math Camp he attended the summer before. I dug out the material and noticed the web site of ABC. I sent an e-mail to the web site of ABC ending with “... How far I can go with the ... education board?”

This opened a brand new world because we were never alone in the battle afterwards. Over night, I got an e-mail from the SEAC at the board and after two more e-mails our options and possible outcomes were clearly defined. We decided to request for IPRC so that we would be the ones to confront the teachers.

Then it was the case conference, which is an optional procedure before a parent-initiated IPRC. So we went to the meeting with teachers' comments in James' report card to prove that teachers had noticed his relatively high intelligence level. However, we were overwhelmed. We were told that if the child is gifted his report card should often say that he is performing beyond his grade level. His teacher had a stack of his class work to illustrate his tardiness and lack of initiative. His science duotang, which "he forgot to take home to study for his test", showed his poor grades in projects. His math enrichment set, which was never allowed to leave his classroom, recorded (by the teacher) the conversation between the teacher and James why he was not progressing well. At the end, the conclusion was that he just didn't have the right stuff.

We were appalled and felt that we were to blame because we were too busy with our work. Thanks to the list and websites provided by the ABC SEAC at the board, we started our learning process. Once the concept was understood, gathering evidence became a pleasant process because those little things on a child are always in the back of a mother's mind. We generated a document to report the giftedness of James. We sent it in to further the IPRC process.

By now the reluctance among the educators were obvious. One day the principal of the school sent me a message "I have consulted with our superintendent, ... I received further information from ... Since the IPRC purpose is to identify an exceptional need, and James does not fulfill the criteria to be identified as gifted, I cannot hold an IPRC meeting. An appeal is a parent's objection to a label or identification of their child's needs. Since James is not identified as exceptional, or as requiring special education, there can be no appeal. ... Describing James' actions and development since infancy will not affect the points nor the process. ..." By the end of the day, the "misunderstanding" was clarified after the involvement of the ABC SEAC at the board.

Two days before the IPRC meeting, I received a call from SEPST at the board. She started to look into the problem in CAT3 test. Meantime, she was willing to give James CAT2 test before IPRC. I refused and hoped that IPRC would re-examine all available information including the document I wrote on James. However, IPRC was short and just a formality. We were told that there was a mix-up in the test level. The best offer we could get was having James retested with CAT2. In a normal process, James might excel in CAT2 reading test and his life might be happily ever after. However, I shook my head and said no, feeling that I was the one who had intentionally stretched this into a longer process.

Then came the appeal, we were outnumbered. The impression there was that the board followed every rule they documented. We were told that CAT3 level 14 test was proper for James because it would give better ceiling on gifted identification. In chronology of events presented by the board, the bad grades in his "forgotten" science duotang became key evidence adding "he often doesn't complete his work and he puts little effort into his work." Our presentation on James' giftedness again didn't get a chance. We asked if identification process on James should take into consideration of his first language (Chinese) and EFI background, and therefore the possible difficulty for

him in carrying out the reading and language combined set of CAT3. The answer from the board psychologist was NO because his reading skills were VERY HIGH.

We were angry and at the same time we were asking ourselves if we really want to take the last step. We knew that there were very few tribunal cases over the years. I haven't even been to a traffic ticket court. But I just couldn't accept it because it was so wrong. My husband and I thought it over and over, recalling what our parents did for our education. We sent out the appeal letter to the tribunal in the last week of our 30-day time period.

If you find this message and have read to here, you are probably also seeking a solution for your child, and you probably already know a lot more than I did when I started. Trust yourself to be the one that knows your child best. Keep in mind that there are resourceful people ready to help and that for various reasons, people you have to deal with in order to solve your problem may not aware all the rules of the process you are in. Instead, most official documents are posted at the websites and ample information on giftedness are available online if you keep on clicking at any website on gifted education. What's more important is

You are not alone and don't give up.

“Hopefully common sense will prevail.” This is what my friend said to me exactly a year ago. It is happening in my case.