

What is the Chest curious of?

Curious Chest is a recently developed Hungarian measurement tool to map skills and abilities at the age of 4-8. Children of this age are not easy to examine, as they do not possess verbal or reading skills that are required to most ability tests, and their actual mental and physical state strongly influences their test-results. At the same time they are very playful and active, without a very long time of intentional attention, therefore they require interesting and challenging tasks to concentrate for 30-45 minutes. Staff of the District 2 Pedagogy Institute, Budapest, Hungary experienced this problem, and worked out a measurement tool that helps to solve the problem of skill-mapping and talent identification in the kindergarten. The Curious Chest is a special, diagnostic device for the activity-centred talent identification and the mapping of the interests of children aged 4-8.



Test or activity?

Talent professionals have considered giftedness a trait measurable and quantifiable by tests for too long. Nowadays, however, more and more people say that creative thinking cannot be quantified, the quality of talent being different from and more than just high intelligence or any other ability. It is frequently experienced that intelligence tests measure different abilities. The various tests demand different ways of thinking and often not of a kind that will be necessary for exceptional future performance. Therefore, the IQ-based approach is not sufficient for talent exploration. By contrast, important pieces of information can be obtained by observing children in various situations, in playful activities or during assignments.

Too early?

The investigations suggest that giftedness tends to get lost by the age of 6: outstanding abilities do not become competencies if the environment does not call that forth. One major reason of the subsequent underachievement of the gifted is lack of support and of adequate intellectual challenges in the early ages. The highly gifted/talented members of the youngest generation (ages 4-8) are provided very little development matching/boosting their abilities; this is the reason why many assign them to the category of those who are not provided for (Gallagher, 1992; Butler-Por, 1993). Whitmore (1987) goes so far as considering highly gifted children of preschool/lower primary school age the most neglected gifted population. Hungarian talent support is no exception in that it offers the least special programmes to this generation, however important it would be for them.

The Curious Chest answers

Inspired by the above considerations, we set out to design a measuring device suitable for talent identification, based on activities matching the specifics of the age group concerned, i.e. playful ones. The Curious Chest is the result of development efforts of almost 12 months, in the course of which hundreds of young children have played with it, contributing thereby to the broadest possible identification of gifted young pupils.

Our philosophy of giftedness

Our concept of giftedness relies on Gardner's theory. We consider a person gifted if he/she demonstrates outstanding capabilities in at least one area, although he/she may show average performance or underperform in other fields. In line with principle of strengths-based development, we boost the "lagging" areas via the strong ones. This strengthens the weak points and, moreover, it stabilises the outstanding competencies.

Function of the Curious Chest

Since no written questionnaire or test can be used with preschool children, a measuring device meeting the age requirements, suitable for playful assignments and satisfying also the professional criteria had to be developed. We "furnished" the chest with environment- and nature-friendly materials, considering environmental awareness raising an important aspect of the development. The objects/toys in the Chest and the activities and assignments triggered by them let us map the personal interests of preschool children. That is, the Curious Chest is a reliable professional measuring device suitable for talent identification through the assessment of the fields of interest of young children. The results obtained with its help provide a basis for their development and assist also with counselling provided to parents and teachers dealing with them. The measuring device is easy to use, and it provides complex information on the abilities of the children through the assessment of their fields of interest. It is suitable for the examination of children with average or higher abilities. It provides an insight into the child's fields of interest/activities, the complementary fields and the imbalances, the dominant interests and the weaknesses. It makes it possible to collect a large amount of data in relation to the lines of interest, preferred and rejected activities of the child over a short period of time. Data collection takes place with the methods of activation, questioning and observation.

Use of the Chest

Giftedness is identified with the Curious Chest in the context of individual testing. The teacher plays with the child the activity series specified in the Guide in 35-40 minutes. The assignments are integrated in a story; they are presented to the child in relation to a specific part of the story, offering an opportunity for active participation. There is a Wizard's Castle hidden in the Curious Chest. The protagonists with whom the children get acquainted during the assignments live in that beautiful castle. During the test, the teacher-facilitator records the answers of the child as well as his/her own observations on the evaluation form attached to the Chest. In the process, the teacher obtains a picture of not only the quality of the solution, but also the personality of the child, his/her enthusiasm, failure tolerance, persistence and pace of work.

Present – future

The Curious Chest is already in use in various parts of Hungary, mainly at kindergartens. Its use is mastered by prospective facilitators in the form of a 10-hour training course delivered by members of our panel of developers. The children like the idea of the Chest, they take part in the test readily and with joy, and positive feedback from the teachers confirms that the Curious Chest fulfils its function. We sincerely hope that it will help identify as many gifted children as possible and thus make it possible to provide them development matching their high abilities, their lines of interest and their needs already at an early age, that is, in their pre-school and lower primary school years.

Foretaste of the assignments

1. *The Wizard's Castle – castle-building:*

Help build the castle. Complete it.

Insertion of towers by colour	Opposite/same
Insertion of towers	determined, uncertain, can do it with help, cannot do it
Accompanies building with speech	Yes/no

2. *The wizard makes a tour of his castle – Spatial orientation:*

Put the wizard to the right side of the chest, in front of the door, in between the towers.

to the right	to the left	in front of the door	between the towers
OK yes/no	OK yes/no	OK yes/no	OK yes/no

3. *Place the inhabitants of the castle*

The other inhabitants of the castle arrive. Put them where you think they belong. (The first one is indicated by circling.)

The Curious Chest meets the basic requirement of up-to-date testing, as it gives a detailed profile of the child's ability in several areas, thus provides a firm basis for later development. However, cultural bias may call for adaptation in foreign settings, as well as standards for evaluation should be re-interpreted if used outside Hungary, but the developers are ready to help in the adaptation process.

Contact person:

