

# TEACHER'S OBSERVATION OF POTENTIAL IN STUDENTS (TOPS)

## Individual Student Observation Form

U-STAR~PLUS

**TOPS**

An observational tool to recognize outstanding potential in children.

### Purpose

The *Teacher's Observation of Potential in Students (TOPS)* is a tool to help you recognize children (ages 5-9) with outstanding potential who may be gifted. The *TOPS* is designed to be the teacher observation component of a comprehensive approach to recognizing students with outstanding potential. This tool should complement other sources of information. The *TOPS* is organized around nine domains: (1) **Learns Easily**, (2) **Shows Advanced Skills**, (3) **Displays Curiosity & Creativity**, (4) **Has Strong Interests**, (5) **Shows Advanced Reasoning & Problem Solving**, (6) **Displays Spatial Abilities**, (7) **Shows Motivation**, (8) **Shows Social Perceptiveness**, and (9) **Displays Leadership**. Examples of behaviors that can be used as indicators of potential are given for each domain. These behaviors capture both "teacher pleasing" and "non-teacher pleasing" behaviors because bright children are not always "teacher-pleasers". Non-teacher pleasing behaviors can sometimes impede our recognition of students' potential. As you use the Individual *TOPS*, please remember to observe the child in multiple settings over time to best see her/his potential.

### Directions

1. Select a 3 to 6 week period during which to observe the child.
2. Complete the tab on the *TOPS* folder.
3. When you observe the child's behavior within a specific domain, write down the date and a short note describing the observation inside the folder, in the box for that domain.
4. Each additional time you observe the child within a specific domain, add the date and note to the box.
5. If you have work samples or materials connected to the observation, collect them in the *TOPS* folder. This collection will serve as an initial body-of-evidence documenting the child's potential, and can be used in educational planning for the child.
6. After your observation period is completed, compile and reflect on your observations on the Individual *TOPS* Student Profile. Continue documenting your observations and classroom responses as needed.

### Next Steps

After completing the form, it's time to decide how to follow up with this child's strengths and needs.

- ? What are this child's major strengths? In which domains does she/he show outstanding potential?
- ? How can I better respond to this student's potential? What can I do to meet this child's needs in my classroom?
- ? Would additional information help me better understand and plan instruction for this child? If yes, how can I gather this information?
- ? Should I nominate this child for possible identification as gifted?

Some information collected via *TOPS* may be appropriate to share during a parent-teacher conference. Meeting with the student's parents or family members can provide a forum for you to share your observations, gain parental input, and reflect together about how best to meet the needs of the child.

*Authors:* Mary Ruth Coleman, Sneha Shah-Coltrane, Ann Harrison

previously known as the "Harrison Observation Student Form"

U-STAR~PLUS 2010  
Copyright Council for Exceptional Children

### **LEARNS EASILY**

- Is eager to learn.
- Has lots of information.
- Retains and retrieves information easily.
- Carries out complex instructions with ease.
- Completes assignments ahead of others (gets A's without effort).
- Shows strong memory, quick recall.
- Uses complex language & math symbol systems.
- Prefers work with more complexity.
- Refuses and becomes impatient with tedious and repetitious work.
- Appears bored with or rushes through "easy" work.
- Corrects the teacher and students in class.
- Does not show work, only answers.

### **SHOWS ADVANCED SKILLS**

- Reads and comprehends on an advanced level (this may be seen in listening comprehension).
- Tells or reproduces stories and events with detail.
- Has a large vocabulary.
- Uses descriptive language, similies, puns.
- Makes up songs, stories, and rhymes.
- Spends free time absorbed in books (may read when supposed to do other things).
- Seeks non-fiction as well as fiction.
- Generates many writing ideas and products.
- Understands advanced mathematical concepts.
- Understands the meaning and use of maps, diagrams, and graphs.
- Connects and uses mathematical language and skills in meaningful real-world ways.
- Communicates well with symbols (art, design, music, or dance).
- Carries on conversations related to academic topics and within a discipline.
- Masters and shows high level thinking in a specific content area.
- Manipulates situations for specific purposes.
- Challenges teacher to go further in depth and complexity.

### **DISPLAYS CURIOSITY & CREATIVITY**

- Questions, explores, experiments.
- Asks unusual, provocative questions.
- Is curious. Asks how, why, and what if?
- Tries to discover the how and why of things.
- Enjoys doing things in new ways.
- Puts unrelated ideas and materials together in new and different ways.
- Offers unique responses.
- Has an active imagination (likes to pretend).
- Assumes another persona during activities or conversations.
- Has trouble distinguishing fact from fiction.
- Does not follow or wait for directions (makes own rules).
- Refuses to follow rules unless they see "why."
- Is seen as "deviant" or non-conformist.
- Develops and tells elaborate "stories."

### **HAS STRONG INTERESTS**

- Is able to lose self in something of interest.
- Demonstrates unusual or advanced interests.
- Keeps extensive collections.
- Is considered an "expert" in a particular topic (may seem domineering).
- Checks out books on particular topics.
- Chooses to become involved when area of interest is addressed.
- Has interest in areas outside typical school curriculum.
- Leads discussions back to one topic of interest.
- Resists transitions and moving onto new topics of study.

### **SHOWS ADVANCED REASONING & PROBLEM SOLVING**

Is a keen observer (spots details others miss).  
Recognizes patterns.  
Draws accurate and advanced conclusions based on information.  
Designs experiments to test hypotheses (develops logical ways to collect and analyze data).  
Makes mental connections (transfers learning into other subjects or real life situations).  
Sees cause and effect relationships. Asks "why?"  
Expresses relationships between past and present.  
Is aware of problems others do not see.  
Devises or adapts strategies to solve problems.  
Questions "rote" approaches to problem solving.  
Has "out of the box" ways of solving problems and seeing situations.  
Doesn't do well on tests with limited answer choices.  
Is argumentative.

### **DISPLAYS SPATIAL ABILITIES**

Has a good sense of direction.  
Figures out why and how things work.  
Takes objects apart and reassembles with speed and accuracy.  
Creates interesting shapes and patterns.  
Shows unusual talent in various art forms.  
Invents games.  
Creates three-dimensional structures.  
Has excellent motor planning and coordination.  
Needs movement to connect learning to memory.  
Prefers hands-on experiences to learn (uses manipulatives/artifacts).  
Brings gadgets, toys, etc. to tinker with at school.  
Moves around often (keeps hands and body always busy).

### **SHOWS MOTIVATION**

Is a self-starter (requires little direction).  
Is persistent in pursuing and completing self-selected tasks.  
Is independent (requires little feedback).  
Prefers to do things on own ("the quiet child").  
Enjoys challenge of new and different.  
Prefers interacting with older people.  
Converses about mature topics.  
Does not follow typical path (moves to the beat of a different drummer).  
Questions authority (is considered a "trouble-maker" or instigator).

### **SHOWS SOCIAL PERCEPTIVENESS**

Displays sense of humor (may be "class clown").  
Responds to needs of others (is able to see another's point of view).  
Enjoys working in groups.  
Identifies with individuals in books, history, movies, etc.  
Uses skills to resolve conflict.  
Reads social situations well and can gain acceptance in most groups.  
Displays strong sense of justice (may over-react emotionally).  
Is easily distracted by others' needs.  
Is over-talkative and social.  
Uses humor and sarcasm inappropriately.

### **DISPLAYS LEADERSHIP**

Organizes materials and activities.  
Accepts and carries out responsibilities.  
Is sought by others (influences others, positively or negatively).  
Adapts readily to new situations and changes.  
Is a positive and compassionate guide to others.  
Prefers adult company.  
Is seen as manipulative and strong-willed.  
Is seen as "bossy" (wants to be the center of attention).  
Dominates others (may not be a good follower).

**INDIVIDUAL TOPS STUDENT PROFILE**

Name	Birth Date	Gender	Race	ESL/ELL Y or N?	Exceptionalities	Low SES Y or N?	Urban/ Suburban/ Rural
<p><b>I believe this student shows outstanding potential in the classroom.</b>                      Indicate the TOPS domains recognized and describe the student potential and behaviors.</p>							
Domain	Check reason why recognized:		Summary of Observation(s): Best Example				
	Frequency	Intensity					
Learns Easily							
Shows Advanced Skills							
Displays Curiosity and Creativity							
Has Strong Interests							
Shows Advanced Reasoning and Problem Solving							
Displays Spatial Abilities							
Shows Motivation							
Shows Social Perceptiveness							
Displays Leadership							

Overall Teacher Recommendations:

---



---



---



---



---



---



---