

# The Gifted Child

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D. C. HEATH AND COMPANY BOSTON

the responsibility of providing these children with varied experiences in many areas as well as direction in their special field. The gifted young writer needs much experience before he can write for any but a juvenile audience. So too, the actor, the painter, or the sculptor needs broad and varied experiences. The child with artistic talent does not, therefore, offer a new problem to us; instead he reflects the general need of all children to search widely, to test themselves with many materials, and to proceed in the use of mind and hand with happiness and confidence.

### Chapter Thirteen

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## ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS IN EDUCATING

### GIFTED CHILDREN

If a child is hungry, we give him food. In a formal way, we say his need is satisfied by food, especially, of course, the right kind of food.

To determine the kinds of educational food that will satisfy gifted children one must seek an answer to the question: What are the needs of the gifted? With the discovery of their needs we can search for and create for them the best kinds of experiences and activities; in other words, the best education for their maximum development.

The first and obvious answer is that gifted children need what all children need — love and care and understanding, so that their emotions as well as their intellects may be nurtured. They need also the capacity to live with others, to solve their problems and conflicts in constructive, positive ways. They need the tools of learning, the skills required for living in this complicated framework that is the world today. And they need some creative drives to give meaning and purpose to their lives so that their existence

on the earth will not have been in vain. These are the needs of all children, the gifted included. Any program planned by the administration must be conducive to these needs, must foster and assure them.

We must remember that the focus of education is upon living children, whose development as human beings is our first responsibility. This requires a basic attitude to be present in every learning situation, in every classroom, every day — the recognition that every child is always an individual, and at the same time a member of a group. We do not develop as individuals at one moment, and as members of society at another, any more than our bodies function at one moment, our minds at another. This concept of the unitary nature of experience and, therefore, of learning is a major contribution of modern biology and psychology to our knowledge. It must be accepted and incorporated into our programs when administrators create designs for education which will satisfy the needs of all children and especially those who are gifted.

Any program, then, just as any classroom, must make provision for group participation and, at the same time, take into account individual differences. This is a big order, but its magnitude must not deter us from trying to provide for maximum individual growth in group situations. It is of course insufficient for a pupil merely to be a physical member of a group. He must take part in planning, exchanging ideas, sharing experiences, giving and taking — in other words, he must grow in the ability to become a member of the world society which is emerging. In such a framework individuals can learn to contribute to the highest level of their capacity, the gifted more abundantly out of their more favored heritage. Thus it is really out of the recognition and acceptance of children as individuals, as well as members of a group, that the search for satisfying the needs of the gifted begins.

Thus important administrative problems appear: What size of class can provide for the needs of all the pupils in it, including the gifted? And what kinds of programs can be directed toward all — the limited, the average, and the gifted?

In present classroom practice the tendency is to set the teaching techniques to satisfy the average child, ignoring both the limited and the gifted. This is especially true in the high schools

of our country. With the increase in enrollment, the curriculum has been steadily adjusted to meet the needs of average American youth. The result is a leveling down of standards.

In classrooms or school systems which appeal to the average child, the gifted mark time or get into mischief and difficulty from sheer boredom.

"Read that story over again, Johnny. You could not have understood it if you read it so fast," is the too frequent remark to the gifted child. Perhaps the teacher does not know that Johnny is at least a year above his grade in reading ability. Johnny, who has absorbed all there is in the story, either rebels or engages in unapproved behavior. Such a situation results in a serious waste of talent. The discovery and development of gifted children is a major responsibility of all who are concerned with America's future leadership.

#### Administrative Devices

Since other chapters are devoted to the problems of discovery and identification of gifted children, this discussion will be limited to instructional procedures and administrative problems.

#### Acceleration

One of the most common ways to deal with the gifted child is to advance him rapidly from grade to grade. Skipping implies that the child skips over the work of one grade and is moved into another one without having completed certain work. Acceleration means the moving of a child from one level of instruction to another, but only after he has mastered the work of the level from which he is moving. Acceleration is possible only when the classroom instruction is sufficiently differentiated to permit one child to proceed ahead of the group. Judging from some of the arguments presented against acceleration, it would appear that many of the writers have in mind the process of skipping when they refer to acceleration.

Much controversy has gone on about the advantages and disadvantages of acceleration. This has to do chiefly with the recognition of the social and emotional, as well as the intellectual values in the child's development. Terman's opinion is as follows:

"If the gifted child's intellectual welfare were the sole criterion, then promotion ought to be based primarily on mental age, since it is the factor that chiefly determines the intellectual difficulty of the school tasks one is able to master. . . . The question is, how much risk of maladjustment one can afford to take in order to keep the gifted child at school tasks difficult enough to command his attention and respect. The data here reviewed indicate that the risk of maladjustment is less than is commonly believed."<sup>1</sup> His conclusion is that "No universal law can be laid down governing the amount of acceleration desirable. Some gifted children are less injured by acceleration of three or four years than others by one or two years. . . . It is our opinion that children of a 135 IQ or higher should be promoted sufficiently to permit college entrance by the age of seventeen at the latest, and that a majority in a group would be better off to enter college at sixteen."<sup>2</sup> Further studies made by Witty, Pressey, Keys, Hollingworth, and others seem to support the position taken by Terman.

These convictions are not shared by school administrators, however. In a survey made by the Research Division of the National Education Association<sup>3</sup> only 15 per cent of the junior and senior high school principals believed that pupils of superior ability should complete the school curriculum in less time than the average. It is not clear on what basis this overwhelming decision against acceleration is based. Perhaps it is the picture of the brilliant but unhappy sixteen-year-old at college, who is regarded as "queer" by his classmates.

The practice of acceleration raises questions which require more extensive research before further conclusions can be drawn. At which level shall a child be accelerated? It is the thought of some administrators that with early identification of the gifted (at the ages of four and five) they can be permitted to complete in one year, perhaps before the age of six, both the kindergarten

<sup>1</sup> Lewis W. Terman and Melita H. Oden, *Genetic Studies of Genius: Vol. IV, The Gifted Child Grows Up* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1947), pp. 279, 280.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>3</sup> *High-School Methods with Superior Students*, National Education Association Research Bulletin, Vol. XIX, No. 4 (Washington, D.C.: The Association, 1941), p. 163.

and first grade. The argument given for this practice is that they will immediately be challenged by their first school experiences and thus avoid the danger of boredom and careless habits of work.

It might be argued, however, that unless there is a number large enough to form a whole group of such children, the few who are advanced will be out of place. Young five-year-olds in a first grade will certainly find the older and physically stronger boys and girls overpowering, in spite of the five-year-olds being more intellectually advanced than the others. Perhaps in the middle elementary grades the age differences will not seem so sharp as at the earlier levels, and here acceleration may not create such problems of difference in outlook and behavior in the group; but the adolescent years again present problems brought about by the onset of physical and emotional change. If preadolescents, no matter how intelligent, associate continuously with older boys and girls, they usually experience frustration or unhappiness. One such boy remarked, "I don't know why I was invited to that party. They know I don't like girls." This boy, like many others, displayed a typical reaction to members of the opposite sex.

This illustration makes clear one of the limitations of acceleration when used with gifted children. Acceleration, which is quantitative in character, leads to problems of emotional and social adjustment. This disadvantage has caused many educators to seek other ways to meet the needs of gifted pupils:

#### *Segregation*

Some large school systems segregate gifted children. Special classes have been created for them, apart from the regular groups. In these classes may be found pupils of high IQ's or of similar achievement in subject or grades; each group is fairly homogeneous according to a chosen criterion.

The results of studies of segregation are not consistent. In one experiment with sixteen boys and girls, it was found that their scores on achievement tests were only slightly higher than those of a control group. By more subjective standards, however, they were found to be "higher" in initiative, self-assurance, tenacity, and other traits involving emotional and social growth. Other

studies have yielded somewhat different findings. Specialists in psychology, however, seem to favor classes for the gifted in the elementary school and mildly support the practice in the junior high school.

Sufficient data are not available to warrant an unqualified endorsement of segregation, since the practice is of fairly recent origin and experimental data are inconclusive. Do special classes produce pupils who are conceited? Does the gifted pupil overwork in the special class? Does he become socially maladjusted or inadequate as a result of failure to mingle satisfactorily with his peers?

Segregation thus presents special problems for experimentation and study. The most significant is that of the program itself, for if some pupils are separated from others, there arises the task of creating a special curriculum for them. With their superior endowment, whether it be in intelligence revealed by unusual vocabulary, in high abstract or analytical ability, in imagination, social awareness, special talent, manual dexterity, or in all of these qualities, such children must be provided with a program that is stimulating and challenging so that the whole self of each child can be developed every step of the way. This recognition of the need for a curriculum broadened to include all phases of a child's growth has led to efforts to extend the school program beyond its present limited scope.

### *Enrichment*

The concept of enrichment arises from the fact that the usual educational fare is not satisfying, perhaps too meager for inquiring minds with insatiable curiosity and lively interest in living and learning. It is, perhaps, out of the demands of the gifted themselves for more and better education that awareness of their needs has developed. When there is readiness to learn at a greater speed and at a higher level, the teacher and administrator must search for new content and new activity. More of the same is not the answer to the problem of enrichment.

In one study fifteen gifted boys and girls were invited to discuss their interests; all of them expressed the desire to study science. Most of them wished for more time for unscheduled activity in order that they might engage in "research." They wanted more

field trips, too. In short, they were expressing their own needs for enrichment.

With such pressure often coming from the pupils themselves, the curriculum of some schools is being modified in various ways — by the addition of subject matter, by adjustments in time schedules, by assignment of special teachers, and by other changes designed to enrich the program for children of promise.

### *Teaching Procedures*

Among the suggestions offered is a change in approach, a shift to less formal and traditional methods within the classroom. In some schools administrator and staff plan, in the lower grades, a program which provides varied reading materials for these children. Sometimes one finds a tendency to encourage the reading of such children to a point where the content demands understanding beyond their experience. This procedure leads some gifted children to spend time on reading to the exclusion of the "raw materials of living." Failure to participate in the many affairs of childhood may prevent these pupils from achieving wholesome development. In arithmetic, also, concepts and processes should be developed out of the activities of the group, and the same is true of spelling and of creative writing. These activities keep children at their experiential levels, yielding a richness at each stage of growth.

On the other hand, care must be taken that repetition does not deteriorate into routine assignments which require little effort. Nothing has less appeal to the gifted child and is more wasteful than the assignment of five extra problems or ten additional spelling words. He understands the processes and does not need such repetition.

Caution must be exercised in the kind and amount of additional work assigned to the gifted. Teachers often allocate to them the menial tasks — running errands and distributing materials — since the gifted complete their work sooner than other members of the class. The following question should be asked in assigning tasks to gifted pupils: Are the activities designed to develop the powers of the gifted or are they wasteful of time and energy?

If there is a special assignment, it must be an activity which

appeals to students' imagination and insight, for these are often the gifts which should be nurtured and developed. A high degree of imaginative work and logical thinking can be expected of these children.

### *Contracts*

In some schools the materials of study are organized into "contracts" which pupils can fulfill at their own rate for a certain period. They meet for group participation when a certain amount has been "covered." Such a plan is regarded as effective in developing good study habits. There are various types of contracts, confined chiefly to the skills subjects — arithmetic, spelling, and composition — but often including history, geography, and the other social studies. In these the time limit is set so that "working ahead," the bane of the teacher, is precluded, but the amount of subject matter is definitely expanded.

Those who sponsor the contract plan believe that boys and girls take pride in such work. The pupils keep accurate records and strive for improvement. The contracts become also enrichment media through which factual data of the content subjects can be mastered.

As in the programs of acceleration and segregation, that of enrichment presents unique problems. Contracts must be continually revised to fit changing content and the changing needs of different groups. The actual typing, mimeographing, and other details of preparing the materials is expensive and time-consuming, perhaps, in some instances, out of proportion to the values to be achieved. The correction of each contract and the help needed for individualized aid to pupils raises questions of efficiency of procedure, of time, and again, of the size of the class and the number of persons involved with each group.

Perhaps most important of all is the motivation of each student's endeavor to carry out his own purposes and achieve worthy outcomes; he will not do so through contract assignments, prepared and assigned by adults. If he simply fulfills contracts, his attitude may be: "I have finished my geography contract" instead of "I have a map to show." To be really effective, the purpose of learning should be in the mind of the learner as well as in that of the teacher.

### *Units of Work*

In still other schools the administrator and his staff select centers of interest, called units of work, which become the focus for the school program. In these plans a wide variety of activities are included. Among them are trips to points of interest, research and study in the library, experiments in science, painting and drawing, dancing and singing — all centered around a theme. As one administrator has said: "These are the ideal media for teaching the democratic processes, of sharing, of working and living together in harmony through an ever-increasing awareness of and growth in appreciating how individual differences may be utilized and can contribute to the good of the organic whole.

"These hours of cooperative work on the year's unit afford the teacher exceptional opportunities to explore the talents, hobbies, and interests of the individuals in the group. Here latent potentialities, gifts wholly unsuspected, suddenly reveal themselves to the discerning teacher and give her a unique chance for guiding the child and his parents to a wise development of talents for satisfactions in the child's own life and for the good of society.

"These are the times, also, when inhibitions are least evident and personality traits, desirable and otherwise, come to the fore. Again, the sensitive teacher observes such revealing characteristics and confers with both child and parents to insure development of growth and behavior patterns consonant with potentialities and consistent with democratic living of the highest order. When units of work have so much educational worth, the adjustment to make these an integral part of the curriculum is a 'must.' And having made the adjustments, the administrator can hope that his vision of conserving those who, because of their gifts, can serve their country best, will become a reality."

The unit-of-work approach cannot be successful, however, unless teachers are skillful and resourceful, for it requires a competence which the teacher who first assigns pages or chapters and then checks in a question-and-answer recitation, does not recognize or possess. The unit-of-work approach requires creative and original endeavor; moreover, it fails if the teacher does not seek to provide common experiences — and at the same time, to offer challenging individual endeavor.

### The Teacher the Crux of the Problem

In carrying out any of these programs, the administrator must rely upon the classroom teacher. Moreover, the value of any administrative device depends upon the day-by-day experiences with the pupils in the classroom. Inspiration may come from administrators in stimulating teachers to enrich children's experiences. Help can also be provided by administrators in establishing sizes of classes commensurate with individual as well as group attention; in obtaining adequate resources and materials of instruction; in eliminating fears created by false incentives; and in serving as a buffer between the public and the teachers when highly controversial issues arise. Encouragement and understanding can inspire teachers to exert their best efforts; but in most schools the ultimate success of educational endeavor depends upon the teacher.

Teachers of gifted children should display unusual sensitivity in recognizing the potentialities of such pupils; they should maintain a balance between individual and group work in the classroom; they should help pupils solve problems and resolve conflicts; they should aid pupils in mastering the knowledge needed for understanding themselves and the world; and they should display a sincere interest which will inspire confidence.

It is to be hoped that more of our highly endowed youth will enter the profession of teaching. Then education will become to a greater extent a challenge to the gifted children and youth of our country. To awaken such an interest in the career of teaching is indeed a challenge to every administrator.

### Chapter Fourteen

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## THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED CHILDREN AND YOUTH— SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In recent years educators have stressed the significance of the developmental approach in education. Education is looked upon as a process which seeks the maximum development of every boy and girl according to his unique nature and his needs. This concept is in harmony with the democratic ideal, since, in a true democracy, each citizen contributes to the common welfare to the extent of his ability. To enable every person to make his greatest contribution, suitable educational opportunities should be provided.

Educators are awakening to the fact that gifted children in our schools have too often been neglected. These children have seldom been adequately challenged to develop their superior abilities. Although special funds have been appropriated for the education of the mentally and physically handicapped pupil, little or no special provision has been made for the gifted. As a result, children of superior mental ability are often "left to develop their own skills in their own way and in terms of personal initiative alone."<sup>1</sup> In spite of this situation, some gifted pupils are able to make progress in desirable ways. Others, however, as

<sup>1</sup> Catherine C. Miles, "Gifted Children," *Manual of Child Psychology*, edited by Leonard Carmichael (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1946), p. 931.