

GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS

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NEWSLETTER VOLUME TWO, NUMBER FOUR OCTOBER--DECEMBER 1988

As the 1988-89 school year begins, we believe it would be helpful for our readers to learn about Dr. Dorothy Rich's work in the field of parent-education. Through The Home and School Institute of Washington, D.C., she has developed numerous programs for training parents to improve their children's academic and social learning. In this article, which is based upon a speech given to the National League of Cities in May 1988, she describes some of the ideas from her new book entitled, MegaSkills (registered trademark of the author, published by Houghton Mifflin, 1988). This book is of particular importance to educators of the gifted because it discusses and provides many excellent lessons (at the elementary/intermediate levels) for developing fundamental skills and characteristics (e.g., self-confidence, motivation, responsibility and perseverance) which underlie successful learning and achievement. In addition, the sections of this book concerned with helping parents to work effectively with the schools demonstrate the positive effects of parent-involvement activities. We highly recommend that MegaSkills be read and applied by every parent and teacher of the gifted.

The second article introduces the work of a scholar of prehistoric archaeology, Robert Bleiweiss (New York City Public Schools), who clearly demonstrates how the most effective way to teach higher level thinking skills is through a rigorous content-based curriculum. It should be noted that we will publish his curriculum on prehistoric archaeology later this fall.

As in previous issues, the essay by Michael Walters discusses a specific intellectual movement (Deconstructionism) which could have a significant impact on the teaching of gifted children -- unfortunately, as he indicates, the effect would be negative. The final article in this issue by Dr. Judith Ricca (Buffalo, NY Public Schools) discusses how gifted education programs in her city are meeting the challenge posed by Dr. Virgil Ward in his critique of gifted education published in this Newsletter one year ago (Oct.-Dec. 1987). Her article describes the conscientious efforts of a large urban school district to serve gifted students from diverse ethnic groups and social classes.

We welcome your comments and wish you much success in improving the education of the gifted during the 1988-89 school year!

Maurice D. Fisher
Publisher

PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS: MegaSkills *
BY DOROTHY RICH, Ed.D., PRESIDENT
THE HOME AND SCHOOL INSTITUTE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

For twenty-five years, I have specialized in nurturing the abilities of families to help their children learn and to achieve in school. It has been a lonely profession. There are so few of us in the field because while there is a good deal of rhetoric about the importance of parent involvement in children's education -- there is little action and even less sustained funding.

Last year (1987) in an analysis prepared for policymakers, The Forgotten Factor in School Success -- The Family, I identified a startling parent gap in the education reform movement which I have been working to fill. In the mid-1960's, when I started the programs of The Home and School Institute, I was told that schools are IT, that they can do everything, that I should not be talking about the role of the family in the school. In the 1980's, I am told that schools are weak and that families are important, but that there is no one out there to work with. I do not believe what was said to me in the 1960's, and I do not believe what I hear about the weak school and the nonexistent family today.

What I do believe now is surprisingly (even to me) the same as I believed in the 1960's when I began this work -- that both the home and school continue to be powerful institutions. But there is another significant, overlooked force in our children's education. It is the communities we live in -- your town and mine. The real, best, and only hope for improved education in this country is to unite the educational forces of home, school, and community working together.

No one, least of all me, says it is easy. It is more complex than adding an hour to the school day or setting up a teacher career ladder. While these may be worthy objectives, they do not answer the concerns of student motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, and love of learning.

There is justifiable concern about American education today and whether our children are learning enough and working hard enough.

* MegaSkills curriculum is a registered trademark of Dorothy Rich.

The remarkable school success of recently arrived Asian immigrant children has prompted questions about what these children have that American youngsters do not have.

The problem is not that our children do not learn how to read. They do. Educational research indicates that most of our children do learn the basics of reading and mathematics in the early grades. What happens is that many children do not keep on reading and wanting to learn more.

I want to enable families to help children not only acquire the basics but go beyond them to get on the road to being learners for life. These are the abilities our children need as they move into jobs in the 21st century. In this article, I will try to distill what I have learned and provide some specific strategies for you with the goal of raising student motivation and achievement through family involvement.

Primarily, we need a redirection of efforts to take advantage of what is now known about how children learn and how families live and work today. To date, the major form of legislatively supported family educational involvement has been the Parent Advisory Council. Not too many parents, especially employed mothers, can participate in this way anymore. But we should not despair. What we need to care about is involving families in children's education well beyond the school setting. And this is do-able.

MEGASKILLS

In the midst of change, what has remained constant is that parents everywhere -- from suburbs to inner cities -- care about their children and are seeking ways to help them achieve.

I know this from our programs reaching thousands of parents and teachers across the country. Among our methods are school-to-home curricula with activities (I call them "recipes") that families use at home to supplement and extend the work of the school. Family response to the National Education Association's Teacher-Parent Partnership Project used in 18 states was overwhelmingly positive.

The uniqueness of these activities is they are not traditional homework. Their goal is to build what I call MegaSkills -- the big skills such as confidence, responsibility, initiative, perseverance -- that children need to learn everything else.

Children need to be able to apply at home what they learn in school. Parents need to know how to teach effort -- how to teach responsibility -- how to enable children to become what I call, "learners for life." That is what my concept and my book, MegaSkills, is about. For example, MegaSkill activities help parents know that any activity such as sorting the laundry or setting the table are terrific ways to reinforce skills needed for learning. And they get chores done at home. All children need ways to feel successful at home and use what they have learned in school.

This may sound too easy to do any good but do not believe it. Educational research underscores these findings: "If teachers had to choose only one policy to stress, results suggest that the most payoff for the most parents and students will come from teachers involving parents in helping their children in learning activities at home."

Our Home and School Institute data indicate that even short term programs for parents register gains in their attendance at school meetings; more initiation by parents of interactions with the schools; and greater satisfaction in the work of teachers. As a result of these programs, children spend more time with their parents and develop increased readiness to do homework. The increased involvement of parents and the community in public education will produce a golden age of learning -- if only we know how to take advantage of it.

Today, there is a joining of ideas and understandings that were not available to educators before. But, legislation and school programs have not caught up with the current research knowledge and the new practices that need to follow from it such as: NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT (John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Grant to HSI) which involves the participation of five major national organizations in family-as-educator programs; THE FAMILY EDUCATION INFORMATION ACT which encourages family self-help for the prevention of children's learning and growing difficulties; and CONTEMPORARY FAMILY AND SOCIETY TRAINING ACT which offers training for professionals in agencies and schools on how to work with today's families.

SUMMARY

These program and legislative initiatives, separately and as part of a package, focus on an agenda that up to now has not been addressed in education reform. The major priorities for parent involvement in the schools are:

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- Wide Scale Involvement of All Members of the Family in Children's Education. This priority builds on research, concentrating on the role of the family's involvement in education at home, over the more traditional parent involvement roles such as volunteers in school and as members of an advisory council. This approach provides a complementary, not a duplicative effort between home and school.
 - Equity in Parent Involvement. This priority focuses on what all parents can do at home, rather than in the classroom. The classroom role alone limits the number of parents who can participate. Assuring equity in parent involvement means greater educational equity for all children.

The New Wave of Educational Reform. I believe we are entering what I see as the "third wave" of education reform. As I see it, there has been a progression from THEM, to YOU, to US, each time getting closer and closer to the individual. In the first or THEM wave the Federal government, primarily through A Nation At Risk (1983), made the initial move toward reform. In the second wave, it was at the level of YOU, other institutions doing it. The state governments began to enact legislation governing how the schools should improve. In the third wave, which I see forming now, it finally gets around to US and the idea that everyone in society, working together, "on the ground," can make a real difference in the education of our children. This offers the greatest potential for lasting, positive change. Its impact we can all make, and its change we can all be part of.>>

THE NEED FOR A PROGRAM IN PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY FOR GIFTED STUDENTS: A STUDY IN CRITICAL THINKING
BY ROBERT BLEIWEISS, VICE-PRESIDENT
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION
NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

This type of a program is suitable for gifted students because it emphasizes higher level thinking skills and processes rather than the mere acquisition of knowledge. It leads to an understanding and appreciation of the interdisciplinary nature of problems and their solutions. Moreover, it encompasses activities that include: (1) making inferences and drawing conclusions from an analysis of items in an archaeological excavation; and (2) solving problems encountered by prehistoric man in his everyday

struggle for survival.

As in real life, students recognize that many different fields of study must be used to solve problems and make these solutions understandable to others. A program in prehistoric archaeology includes various subject areas such as social studies, music, creative writing, mathematics, research methods, drama, poetry, dance, and the arts. This program also encompasses the sciences of archaeology, paleontology, ecology, anthropology, sociology, geology, biology and meteorology.

Clearly, many problems face our society such as crime, rampant drug addiction, terrorism, the ecological deterioration and destruction of our environment, and unemployment. Gifted students must be given the opportunity to develop leadership skills through participation in controversy and decision-making. Through their unique cognitive and affective abilities, they can develop into tomorrow's leaders who will discover solutions to these problems in the social, political, scientific and academic areas.

In order to reach these solutions, gifted students must understand the academic rigor that scientists pursue in order to develop theories and make inferences based on an evaluation of the evidence they have collected. A scientist has to place his evidence in an open forum for others to study, duplicate and evaluate. This act must be performed regardless of the controversy surrounding the study.

Gifted students can investigate historical controversies that have surrounded scientists such as Charles Darwin, Alfred Wegener, Eugene Dubois, Edward O. Wilson and Donald Johanson. In each of these situations, the scientists had to defend their theories after revealing them to their peers. In 1859, Charles Darwin created a furor after publishing his book, On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection. He proposed that man was descended from the apes. However, his overall studies revealed a new scientific path to understanding life on earth in the past, present and future. Alfred Wegener was ridiculed for suggesting the Theory of Continental Drift, and it was not until after his death that the new science of plate tectonics explained why his theory was basically correct. Eugene Dubois was also derided for suggesting that the bones he discovered in Java of *Pithecanthropus erectus* (Java Man) were from an ancestor of modern man. In the end, he was so disillusioned, he buried the bones under the floor boards of his house for over thirty years. Later discoveries and understanding proved he was correct.

These controversies occurred at a time when scientists with new ideas were trying to be heard over the entrenched establishment. As knowledge grew in their fields of science, the ridiculed became the honored.

Controversies still abound in today's scientific openness, and that is how it should be! For example, Edward O. Wilson's ideas (Sociobiology) that the behavior of other life forms can be applied to human beings has created a raging argument. He has discussed man and animals in terms of altruism, territoriality, aggression, selfishness, deceit, hypocrisy and desertion. Other scientists are attacking him for suggesting that these traits and the present social order of man is natural, inevitable and unchangeable. Donald Johanson's discovery of the largest collection of fossil *Australopithecus afarensis* has created an ongoing dispute. Are they and *Australopithecus africanus* the same species? If they are different, which one of them was the direct ancestor to man? Both Edward O. Wilson and Donald Johanson placed their evidence in the open for others to study, discuss and criticize.

Why is the study of these scientists important to gifted students and a program in prehistoric archaeology? First, as was previously indicated, gifted students with their unique abilities must be given the opportunity to develop leadership skills. Secondly, they must develop the ability to become constructive evaluators of theories, situations and applications as responsible scientists and decision makers. By studying the great scientists of the 19th and 20th centuries in a course on prehistoric archaeology, gifted students will learn about the highest types of scientific leadership and the assessments which these leaders made of theory and practice.

A program in prehistoric archaeology must provide opportunities for students to investigate archaeological digs and develop original theories, applications and products based upon the evidence they discover. They must also evaluate their findings in discussions with their fellow students. As they participate in these activities, they are concurrently studying the work of past and present scientists.

The problems facing society today require educational programs that highlight the interdependence of people and nations in our world. This, coupled with an understanding of man's activities and their effects on the physical environment, calls for educating tomorrow's gifted decision makers to help solve these complex problems. Prehistoric and modern man can both be studied in the

light of their problems, decisions and relationship to their environment, and conclusions reached about each situation. By engaging in this type of study, students can then appreciate the past in order to more readily understand the present and future.

A program in prehistoric archaeology must include inferences concerning how man developed and used his skills, and how he thought and reacted. It must also contain activities that feature how he reached decisions and solved problems. The skills acquired in this program will build constructive feelings of social consciousness, responsibility and group standards of behavior. It would create an increased sensitivity and understanding of the feelings of other people. And gifted students would become concerned with the values and different forms of communication that broaden understanding among people.

Classroom activities would stress interaction and cooperation among students. At the same time, they would maintain their individuality, beliefs and values, while respecting those of their classmates. The program would allow for disagreement and different methods of analyzing, solving and evaluating ideas and problems. Students would test their positions against the positions of others, and reach decisions based upon their individual or group evaluations.

The wonder and lure of prehistoric archaeology is another important reason for introducing students to this exciting subject. The stimulating educational experiences provided by a course in this area will motivate students to make further scientific investigations. The controversies discussed in this article are just one small aspect of the discoveries awaiting students.

They will learn of the tenacity of Louis Leakey and how he searched Olduvai Gorge for thirty years until he discovered fossils of early man, just as he had predicted. When he wanted to prove that man could survive as a scavenger, he studied how the hyenas and wild dogs harassed lions off their kills. Then, with the help of his two young sons, he reenacted their actions without using modern weapons or instruments, and drove lions off their kills.

Students will realize that Neanderthal man was not the ignorant brute pictured in stories and movies. Instead, he was intelligent, a fine tool maker and hunter, and he was the first man to have the sensitivity to bury his dead, and to include artifacts and flowers in the grave.

They will "travel" with Christopher Janus, a businessman, as he tries to locate the lost bones of Peking Man (*Sinanthropus pekinensis*) for the People's Republic of China. These bones were lost during World War II when Japanese soldiers captured United States Marines who were bringing them back to the USA for safekeeping. Who was the mysterious woman who agreed to meet him on the Observation Deck of the Empire State Building, but then ran away never to be seen by him again? Are the bones in the possession of Chinese within China itself, or in Taiwan, or with former generals and drug dealers in the Burma Triangle?

These are just a few examples of the investigations and adventures awaiting the gifted in a program on prehistoric archaeology which is designed to sharpen their higher thinking skills and develop new insights.

Through role playing, students will develop a means for simulating prehistoric man's daily life. They will plan mammoth hunts and design campsites and burials. They will create prehistoric music from items gathered from the natural environment, and combine it with songs, dances, myths and legends.

They will also reach conclusions as to why fossil fish are found in waterless canyons or on mountain tops, and how man may have reached North America and Java where oceans now bar their way. They will experiment with man's physical adaptations and how they helped him to survive for three million years. They will analyze excavations and sites many miles apart and try to explain why there are similar and different items in each stratum of soil.

Gifted students will embark on a fantastic journey -- reliving the past, comparing it to the present, and preparing for the future.>>

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HUMAN GENIUS VERSUS DECONSTRUCTIONISM

BY MICHAEL E. WALTERS

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Deconstructionism is the belief that literature is not the result of the author's personal vision, style and artistic talent, but a mere reference point in culture with no definite meaning. According to this approach to literary criticism, all books, stories, poetry and works of art are of equal importance to their audience. It is the audience of readers that determines the relevance of a literary work, not the artistic vision, personality and integrity of the author. Despite the politically left orientation of this viewpoint concerning the meaning and significance of literature, it actually represents the free market approach of supply and demand -- the significance of literature is based upon the current demands of the marketplace.

Deconstructionism, which has become very influential in English departments and Humanities programs at major universities, strikes at the heart of gifted education. This area of education realizes, accepts and promotes the concept that there exists a realm of human achievement known as genius ("a unique category of human abilities"). Educators of the gifted assume that there are unique human beings with special gifts for producing intellectual insights and artistic creativity. The Deconstructionists' attack on the significance of an author's creativity is most of all an attack upon human uniqueness.

What makes Shakespeare a great writer is the unique and enduring way he expressed himself to his readers, not the judgments of elitist critics. This is true of all great works of genius. These works are not sociological categories such as white, male, Western culture, or Christian; but instead, they are transcendental achievements by reason of their genius. Shakespeare immersed himself in the literature of the past such as the Latin and Greek classics and the chronicles of history. His reading of these works and his sensitivity were the sparks that ignited his ingrained genius. The Deconstructionists' refusal to deal with the genius of Shakespeare or Dante is a denial of all human genius. However, their movement can do educators of the gifted a service by making us reaffirm and communicate the noble values of human genius and the Humanities.>> REFERENCES -- (1) Atlas, James. (1988, June 5). The Battle of the Books. The New York Times Magazine. (3) Edmundson, Mark. (1988, July). A Will To Cultural Power: Deconstructing the de Man Scandal. Harper's. (4) Hook, Sidney. (1988, May). The Color of Culture. Chronicles of Culture.>>

RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR VIRGIL WARD'S CALL TO ARMS FOR IMPROVING
GIFTED EDUCATION

BY JUDITH RICCA, Ed.D., PRINCIPAL, THE FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED
SCHOOL, BUFFALO, NEW YORK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

It is not the purpose here to debate the wisdom or validity of Dr. Ward's call (1987) to reaffirm, in practice, the science of differential education for the gifted. To do so would be redundant in light of the vast array of supporting literature. In the same manner, Cecile Frey's comments (1988) are also well-taken, especially as they pertain to individual differences within the gifted population. Ward (1987) also notes that each individual within the realm of his/her responsibility must work to maintain the integrity of differential education. At the same time, he does not advocate that we ignore variables such as the specific population, available resources, and community mandates which have an impact upon a program.

In large city school districts, the problem is compounded by the diversity of the population and the distribution of the potentially gifted within the community. Recognizing that more than one program is needed, the Public Schools of Buffalo, New York, are attempting to address the problem with three separate but related approaches. City Honors, an academic prep school magnet program for grades 5-12 provides special programming for accelerated students and will initiate an International Baccalaureate in 1989. The Buffalo Academy for Visual and Performing Arts concentrates on the development of talent in art, music, drama and dance. The newest magnet program, The Frederick Law Olmsted School, is a unique blend of identified gifted children within the normally heterogeneous neighborhood population. This K-8 school serves 1,100 students in three sites with emphasis upon a four-stage cognitive development model and qualitatively differentiated instruction.

Of great concern is the problem of evaluating these programs. In times of tight money and continued charges of elitism, it is imperative that G/T programs show their value to educators, school boards, and the taxpaying public. Unfortunately, internal evaluation by educators of the gifted and standardized testing are not the answer to this problem. In partial response to this situation, the Buffalo Public Schools will participate in a state pilot project to develop rigorous program evaluation models for gifted education programs.>> REFERENCES -- (1) Frey, Cecile P. (1988, Jan.). Letter in GEP NEWSLETTER. (2) Ward, Virgil S. (1987, Oct.-Dec.). Differential Education for the Gifted 1987: A Descriptive Analysis and Call to Arms. GEP NEWSLETTER.>> *****

LETTERS

FROM RUSSELL JACOBY (VENICE, CA) REGARDING MICHAEL WALTERS' REVIEW OF JACOBY'S BOOK, THE LAST INTELLECTUALS (1987) -- Somehow your note, which was attached to the review of my book in the Gifted Education Press Newsletter (January 1988 Issue) surfaced in a stack of my papers. Hence, this is a very belated thanks for the review which I thought was excellent. FROM WILLIAM C. GEORGE, STAFF SPECIALIST, TALENT IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM, DUKE UNIVERSITY -- I wanted to write and let you know that we will mention the Gifted Education Press Newsletter in the fall issue of our Insights newsletter that goes to approximately 150,000 homes and schools in our talent search region. We will mention your newsletter in the next issue of our TIP NETWORK Newsletter. I would like to thank you for your kind comments about our national Educational Opportunity Guide that we publish yearly. FROM SUSAN G. LEWIS, GIFTED PROGRAM SUPERVISOR, SARASOTA COUNTY, FL PUBLIC SCHOOLS -- This is certainly a fine publication (GEP NEWSLETTER) to promote and encourage the networking that is so vital to those of us who are dedicated to educating the gifted. The opportunities that this contact provides will be multitudinous as we continue our efforts to expand our options here in Sarasota County.>>

CONGRATULATIONS to James LoGiudice for the excellent workshop he presented in August 1988 at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. This Institute was sponsored by the Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services. Judy Malcolm, Coordinator of Gifted & Talented Education for the State of Maine, indicated that the participants were very impressed with LoGiudice's sessions on "Designing a Conceptual Framework for Humanities Education" and "Curriculum Development for the Gifted and Talented." His talent and experience would make him an excellent consultant to any gifted program in the nation.>>

PUBLICATIONS

MegaSkills (1988) by Dorothy Rich can be ordered directly from GEP. If interested, send us a check or purchase order for \$8.95 plus \$1.50 for P&H. FORTHCOMING BOOK BY ROBERT BLEIWEISS -- Let us know if you would like to receive information about Bleiweiss' exciting and rigorous book on teaching prehistoric archaeology to be published by GEP this fall. The foreword will be written by Dr. Richard E. Leakey, Director/Chief Executive of the National Museums of Kenya, Africa. PLEASE WRITE US to obtain information about our eighteen books on educating the gifted and reading education. Also, this Newsletter can be ordered from us for a subscription cost of \$12.00 per year.