

GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS

P. O. Box 1586
10201 Yuma Court
Manassas, VA 22110
(703) 369-5017

NEWSLETTER
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NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS!

While reading Oliver Sacks' book, Awakenings (1983), I was impressed with this brilliant neurologist's work with patients who suffered from sleeping sickness and Parkinson's disease -- one patient for as long as fifty years before showing improvement. These "awakenings" show that human beings can recover from the most debilitating illnesses if they are fortunate enough to receive the best treatment by dedicated professionals. The similarities between Sacks' patients and the gifted/learning disabled students discussed in Cecile Frey's article (which follows this introduction) are not very obvious. However, there is one important similarity which both of these groups show in their daily lives -- lowered mental functioning. Although no "miracle cure" has been discovered for children with learning disabilities, Frey's recommendations for educating gifted children who have this problem are based upon her eleven years of teaching and managing programs for the gifted.

Most educators of the gifted have learned that Albert Einstein and Leonardo da Vinci had learning disabilities. Although this statement has a cliché-like meaning because of its overuse in discussions of gifted students with learning problems, it is important to keep Einstein and da Vinci in mind when designing programs for gifted/learning disabled students. These programs should concentrate upon developing their abilities to the highest possible levels in a manner which is similar to programs for gifted students who are not handicapped. Frey's article also demonstrates that educators should identify students who show the greatest potential for high achievements, rather than only selecting students who are currently functioning at maximum levels on standardized tests.

This issue of our Newsletter includes a review by Michael Walters of Russell Jacoby's new book, The Last Intellectuals (1987). As Jacoby has shown, the number of intellectual generalists and "renaissance" men and women has declined considerably during the last twenty years; thereby producing a decrease in the quality of public discourse and a shortage of individuals with backgrounds in both the humanities and sciences. Walters' review and Frey's article lead to the following questions: How do we motivate gifted students to read and study widely across many subjects of the curriculum? How do we educate them to take a broad view of problems based upon a variety of intellectual perspectives?

Responses to Virgil Ward's article, Differential Education for the Gifted 1987: A Descriptive Analysis and Call to Arms (Volume I, Issue 4), are also contained in this issue. We greatly appreciate these letters from June Cox, Cecile Frey, A. Harry Passow and Robert Sawyer, and look forward to receiving other statements about Ward's ideas or responses to these letters. Congratulations are due to Dr. Ward for receiving national recognition at The National Association for Gifted Children annual meeting of November 1987 where he was commended for his important work in this field during the last 35 years!

Maurice D. Fisher, Publisher

PUBLISHER OF BOOKS ON DIFFERENTIAL EDUCATION FOR THE GIFTED

THE GIFTED/LEARNING DISABLED STUDENT
CECILE P. FREY, Ed.D.
COORDINATOR OF GIFTED PROGRAMS
LOWER MERION, PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

The practice of labeling children in academic settings has been increasing in the United States, especially since the mandate for gifted education arose in the 1970's under the auspices of the U.S. Office of Education. During the last twenty years, considerable increases have occurred in the refinement of identification techniques by psychologists, and in the knowledge and acceptance of individual differences by the public and teachers. These changes make it easier to understand the current proliferation of students who are considered "in need of" some form of special education.

Among the most frustrating and difficult groups of children for teachers, parents and administrators to understand is the one labeled as gifted/learning disabled. Although many definitions of giftedness exist, I am referring to only one category in this article -- intellectual giftedness as measured by a full scale I.Q. of 130+ on an individualized test. A learning disability, by federal definition, is "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations." Such disabilities must be separate from cultural, economic and environmental deprivations. In addition, this federal definition does not include children whose problems are the result of visual, hearing or motor handicaps, or mental retardation (Federal Register of Dec. 30, 1976, p. 56977). As with the gifted, students so identified must be evaluated by a trained psychologist.

Once children have "reached the magic number" and been labeled as gifted, then parents and teachers relax. If they are underachieving or acting out in the classroom, they must be "lazy" or "lack motivation." The dual tag of gifted and learning disabled seems so contradictory that it is difficult, if not impossible, for many to accept. Yet as Bobbie Jones, who writes on the "Gifted Dyslexic," says: "Intellectual superiority does not guarantee academic excellence." (p. 302)

Characteristics of Gifted/Learning Disabled (LD) Students

Although traits vary from child to child, an alert educator or parent should be aware of possible problems if more than one or two exist. Gifted/LD students are often highly verbal, and score well on vocabulary tests, especially if they are administered orally. Their academic growth is uneven, with real talent in one area (like math) and serious academic deficiencies in another (like reading). Such students may show visual-perceptual or fine-motor difficulties, and be unable to learn even such a simple task as writing script. Often, these children

are quite rigid, and become frustrated and upset if asked to shift from one activity to another. They frequently lack organizational skills, and are the ones whose book bag and desk are in perpetual chaos, and who can never find the homework they swear was finished the night before. In social relationships, these students seem vulnerable, often exhibiting more difficulties with peer interactions. In fact, Attention Deficit Disorder, which in the past has been characterized as an emotional disorder, is now classified as a specific learning disability. On individualized intelligence tests such as the WISC-R, there is more scatter in subtest scores than one would expect in the normal population (see Schiff, Kaufman and Kaufman, 1981). Many of these children suffer from low self-esteem and self-confidence, but this is hardly surprising. If one is constantly told about his or her brightness, and then has difficulty performing, what else can be expected?

Yet gifted/learning disabled students exhibit many positive characteristics, such as excellent speaking skills, advanced developmental milestones, good conceptual and problem-solving skills, and excellent memories. It is precisely because of such positive characteristics that many problems stand in the way of accurate diagnosis, especially early diagnosis, which could lead to easier, more successful remediation. Both parents and teachers tend to think that "giftedness" and "learning disability" are mutually exclusive terms, so a student with one label never has the other. Furthermore, such students tend to "coast," especially in the early grades, because they are able to compensate for their specific educational weaknesses. "Dysynchrony," the term given to unequal academic development, causes many educators to attribute these weakness to sloth or "lack of motivation." Paul Daniels (1983), a writer on gifted/LD students, calls one category of students, "pseudoachievers." They work at grade level, but should in fact be able to do much better with less difficulty. If a child is upset or exhibits low self-esteem, he or she is frequently considered "socially and emotionally disturbed" rather than learning disabled; yet an accurate diagnosis needs to be made before appropriate remediation can occur.

Program Modifications

What modifications can be made in order to expedite learning and help gifted/learning disabled students reach their potential? Without doubt, the first and most important task is accurate diagnosis. Then, the literature suggests that success can occur if the home and school are willing to serve as partners, prescribing and initiating individual modifications whenever appropriate. Every person working with the student must have a clear understanding of this dual classification. This includes parents, teachers in the basic education program and in the resource room, and counselors and administrators. Only then can the student even begin to feel positive about himself.

If these students are placed in an LD resource room, then they should also have the opportunity to interact with gifted students in an intellectually stimulating setting. One suggestion frequently made is that they should concentrate on their specific areas of difficulty in the resource room and on their strengths in the gifted program. In addition, these children should be mainstreamed as much as possible.

Teacher Selection

Teachers who work with such students must be carefully selected. They should possess an understanding of themselves and of giftedness, and see themselves primarily as facilitators of learning. They should be able to provide feedback and --- most of all --- the capacity to create a classroom environment which promotes self-esteem and at the same time offers safety for risk-taking and creative problem-solving. They must have, and be able to show, faith in the student.

Parent and Student Needs

Parents may need counseling and guidance, first to understand and accept the diagnosis, and then to learn the most effective ways to cope with it. Often, if the learning disability is a family trait, they must first absolve themselves of any guilt for passing the characteristic on, before they can offer appropriate support. Often, family therapy helps everyone in the home to understand and support the child.

Students must also understand themselves, and this can occur through counseling, class discussion, and/or reading about others who were able to "make it" despite specific disabilities. Einstein is frequently cited as not having talked until he was four; Woodrow Wilson did not read at all until he was eleven.

The Responsibility of the Schools

Schools must also provide flexible programming for such students, taking into account their strengths and weaknesses as well as their learning styles. Teachers, administrators and psychologists must be committed to early identification, rather than waiting until the child is exhibiting real difficulties or emotional frustration. Inservice training must be provided both to special education teachers and to teachers in the basic program in order to insure understanding of such a seemingly contradictory label. If appropriate, successful people from the community, who faced similar problems themselves when they were young, might be used as speakers and mentors. Everyone working with such students must look for ways to reward both daily and long term efforts.

But in the long run, it is the students themselves who must understand why their performance in school is uneven and frustrating. Perhaps the advice of

Nelson Rockefeller, a noted dyslexic, might help such students to feel better about themselves: "Face the challenge . . . work harder and learn mental discipline -- the capacity for total concentration -- and, never quit" (Given, 1977, p. 71). Teachers and parents of gifted/learning disabled children should make the commitment to help them in any way possible to reach the point where they are able to benefit from Rockefeller's advice; only then will they be able to develop self-esteem and reach their true potential.¶¶

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BOOK REVIEW

THE LAST INTELLECTUALS BY RUSSELL JACOBY (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

"The only way to forget is to remember." Sigmund Freud

If Allan Bloom's book (The Closing of the American Mind, 1987, reviewed in Vol. I, No. 4) has touched the collective psyche of the American book buying public, then it is fair to inquire why Jacoby's book has not. Current opinions among American social critics appear to be that there is a malaise in academia, and a hiatus of serious intellectual thought and depth-of-feeling. Yet, one would expect that many of those responding to Bloom's "jeremiad" to also be interested in Jacoby's book. However, the difference is in the tonal quality

of these books. Bloom, despite his difficult prose and thought, possesses a tone of urgency which stresses that the barbarians are at the gates of Western civilization. He also teases his readers with good solid villains, e.g., those gun-toting Black students, brash feminists, scrawny greasers of Rock-and-Roll and most tantalizing of all, insidious Germanic philosophers who seize the mental structures of our college youth, like the alien pods in the science fiction film classic, "The Invasion of the Body Snatchers." Just as these pods took over human forms, Germanic philosophical ideas (according to Bloom) have captivated the tender idealism of generations of American college youth. In contrast, Jacoby's book is more in the tone of melancholic nostalgia. Instead of examining "intellectual terrorists," his analysis is rooted in the solid facts of the social sciences. Bloom leaves his readers with a residue of fear, while Jacoby causes them to depart with a heart-rending sadness.

Jacoby does not fault present-day intellectuals with lacking strong cognitive abilities. Rather, it is the affective realm that concerns him. The nation currently lacks intellectuals who seek to write for and discourse with an educated public. The contemporary intellectual, according to Jacoby, writes for academia, the bureaucratic agency, and the Beltway think tank. It is not an elite group that he seeks to address, but a narrow subgroup within that elite. The result is that the public is denied access to discourses on social issues which affect its daily life. This condition is the reversal of what Thomas Jefferson desired as the role of the university in a democracy. Instead of educating laymen so that they can participate in political debate in an informed manner, the "modern" university isolates the American people from intellectual engagement.

The paradigm which Jacoby believes is the ideal intellectual is based upon Edmund Wilson, Lewis Mumford, C. Wright Mills, and in the last century, Ralph Waldo Emerson. All of these individuals wrote for an educated American public. Jacoby also describes the social factors which have affected intellectuals during the last twenty years, such as the destruction of an urban environment that provided areas for Bohemians and independent thinkers to live in, and gather and exchange their ideas. Greenwich Village is a prime example of this destruction, since in the 1970's and 1980's, the gentrification of this area of New York City has made it economically impossible for free lance writers and most intellectuals to live there. Moreover, the current demands of academia even cause Marxist scholars to become socially accepted non-iconoclastic thinkers. In order to obtain tenure, even the most intellectually radical professors must express themselves in a safe academic manner. This stimulates a style of writing which only academic experts and specialists can understand.

All of these problems discussed by Jacoby are applicable to gifted students precisely because they will become the future intellectuals. Will they follow the Yuppie generation and think mainly of their careers, economic security, and social prestige, or will they emerge as a new generation of challenging

intellectuals who seek to write for an educated public? This matter could be determined by the quality of gifted programs, i.e., their content and pedagogy. Hence, we must expose our gifted students to such thinkers as the following: Emerson, Thoreau, Rachel Carson, H.L. Mencken, Edmund Wilson, Mortimer Adler, Erich Fromm, and Lewis Mumford.

There is a glimmer of light which Jacoby also neglected to include in his book. Several current scientific thinkers and writers such as Stephen Jay Gould, Howard Gardner, Bruno Bettelheim, Lewis Thomas, Carl Sagan and Oliver Sacks are indeed writing for an educated public. What these individuals express in their writing is an interdisciplinary approach to solving problems, and how what they are writing about has implications for many different areas of society. Educators should also write in an interdisciplinary fashion and stress how their ideas can apply to society as a whole. Perhaps newsletters such as this one will create the type of climate for re-establishing a dialogue between professional educators and an educated public. For John Dewey, such a dialogue was what philosophy was really about. As indicated by Jacoby, we must return to an intellectual appetite and curiosity for the great ideas of human inquiry.¶¶
Michael E. Walters, New York City Public Schools

"I would rather lose in a cause which will eventually prevail than to triumph in a cause doomed to failure." **Woodrow Wilson**

LETTERS IN RESPONSE TO VIRGIL WARD'S ARTICLE, DIFFERENTIAL EDUCATION FOR THE GIFTED 1987: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS AND CALL TO ARMS (VOLUME I, NUMBER 4)

From Dr. June Cox, Executive Director; Gifted Students Institute; Fort Worth, Texas:

I read with interest Virgil Ward's thought provoking article, "Differential Education for the Gifted 1987: A Descriptive Analysis and Call to Arms." As you may know from when I directed the Richardson Study in 1981-1984, I visited programs for the gifted students throughout this country. During that period, I also brought educators together several times a year to discuss various approaches to educating gifted students with my advisory committee and me. We concluded that while there are some outstanding programs, many are fragmented and lack substance.

Congratulations to Dr. Ward for his "Call to Arms!" Little wonder Michael Walters compares his [Ward's] essay with Allan Bloom's, The Closing of the American Mind. Dr. Ward, worthy pioneer that he is, has not lost his passion for his beliefs or his vision for his chosen field.

My best wishes to you both.

From Professor A. Harry Passow, Jacob H Schiff Professor of Education; Teachers College, Columbia University; New York City. Currently President of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children:

All of this [preceding discussion] leads me to reflect on your memorandum, your paper for Maurice Fisher's Gifted Education Press Newsletter and your "Call to Professional Action for the Restoration of Integrity to the Deteriorated Field" in that piece, and to ponder an adequate response. As I have written elsewhere and have commented on for the past quarter of a century, Virgil Ward's **Differential Education for the Gifted: An Axiomatic Approach** is one of the few attempts to provide a cohesive base to the concept of differentiated education for the gifted. I do not believe that there was ever a "once cohesive literature (language, logic, practical inference) developed around this serviceable conceptual prototype" and, consequently, I do not believe that it has been "substantially displaced." In fact, I think that the current literature is at least as well-grounded as much of the earlier literature which, with only a few exceptions, is not saying much. In addition, I think that people like Joe Renzulli and Barbara Clark, for example, would argue that they do have "conceptual integrity, stability and directionality." Incidentally, I do not think that the "pioneers" had any greater understanding or vision or even commitment than do many of those currently involved in DEG.

I think that for the past 33 years, I have constantly and continuously been reflecting upon, examining and re-examining "the nature and consistency and justifiability of [my] own understandings, beliefs and practical commitments." My "understandings, beliefs, and practical commitments" may be erroneous but they have emerged from my continuous reflection about what is appropriate differentiated education for the gifted and how it can be provided.

All of the above rhetoric may only obfuscate the "bottom line" of my response to your [article]. Abe Tannenbaum's book is surely several years' efforts by him to do precisely what I think you are asking be done. Others would probably make the same claim. So, in the end, I can support the intent of your resolution -- that we "leaders" reflect on the "integrity [of] this inordinately consequential educational initiative"--although I do not concur that this will restore an "historic and intellectual legacy...held in common among its pioneers" since I do not believe such a legacy ever existed. And, in the end, I can support the notion that we "leaders" be much more thoughtful in terms of developing and explicating a theoretical foundation for DEG. Virgil Ward's **Differential Education of the Gifted: An Axiomatic Approach** might serve as a guide for our reflection and re-examination!

From Professor Robert N. Sawyer, Director; Talent Identification Program and
 Precollege Program; Duke University; Durham, North Carolina:

Thank you very much for inviting me to respond to Virgil Ward's critique of gifted education (Gifted Education Press Newsletter, 1[4]). I regret that I have to decline. I think that Professor Ward and I see the situation in gifted education similarly, and I believe my comments would have little more to offer. A point once made seems to me to be made enough.

(Professor Sawyer presented a paper at the November 1985 meeting of The National Association for Gifted Children entitled In Defense of Academic Rigor. Also, look for a more recent version of this paper in a forthcoming issue of the Journal for the Education of the Gifted (CEC-TAG publication).

From Dr. Cecile P. Frey; Coordinator of Gifted Programs; Lower Merion School District; Ardmore, Pennsylvania:

As one who has been both a teacher of the gifted and a person involved in curriculum development for the gifted for eleven years, I found myself nodding in agreement over the criticism of the current "state" of gifted education made by Dr. Virgil Ward in the GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS NEWSLETTER (Oct.-Dec. 1987). His points are indeed well taken, and his criticisms of "democratic selection" and "disingenuous logic and calculated mass appeal" are serious concerns to anyone currently involved in the field. Even more telling are some of his other criticisms.

A real problem in many school districts and states is the fact that there is no certification to be a teacher of the gifted; often the least senior person, whether he/she has any interest or understanding of these special needs children is chosen for the position. Further, there is little in the way of inservice or graduate coursework offered; hence the newly-appointed person must read and discover (if he or she is so inclined) much pertinent information on his own. Curriculum is often either non-existent or disconcertingly vague; hence, one must learn not only about the affective needs of the students, but develop a course of study at the same time. If there is a curriculum in effect, it may not in fact be meeting the needs of the students, yet there is little leeway in modifying the current plan. If, as is true in many places, there is little commitment on the part of administrators and school boards to gifted education, the other faculty members are unlikely to be supportive. Hence, the program may be sabotaged in many ways before any learning takes place.

A second basic problem, as Ward points out, is with the curriculum itself. What do such catch phrases as "creative", "divergent", or "enrichment" really mean? Where is the rigorous study of implementation of curriculum, in order to decide what is IN FACT appropriate for gifted children? What is true differentiation? ALL too often, "gifted" education is really a synonym for

"more." Further, after eleven years in the field, I know that no curriculum is equally appropriate for all students. Rather, without consideration for individual differences AND differences in learning styles, much of what is offered under the rubric of gifted education is innocuous and does not help students toward intellectual or emotional growth.

A last category of difficulty, which Ward does not address directly, is the vast number of individual differences within the gifted community. Gifted students, like others with special needs, cannot be seen as a "lump." Girls? Minority gifted? Gifted/learning disabled? Underachievers? Gifted/socially and emotionally disturbed? All need additional, individualized programming for real growth and self-esteem.

Hence, Ward's call for a return to "the integrity of Differential Education for the Gifted" is well taken, and should be seriously considered by teachers, administrators, school boards and parents. The call should also be taken up in university departments of education, many of whom see courses about the gifted as easily expendable. Last, a call should be made to both federal and state governments to press for funding for serious, rigorous studies about what is and is not appropriate for gifted children, both in terms of academic development and affective growth. Only then will our "resources for the future" have the opportunity to contribute as much as they might to society.¶¶

ANNOUNCEMENT -- The Center for Gifted Studies at the University of Southern Mississippi publishes an excellent newsletter on developing leadership skills in gifted students. Please write to Suzanne Meriweather for more information: Department of Special Education; University of Southern Mississippi; Southern Station, Box 5115; Hattiesburg, MS 39406-5115.

Again, we present a cross section of the requests for our Newsletter since our last issue: Jerry Jones, Kansas State Dept. of Ed; Judith Sachwald, Chief, Governmental Relations, Maryland State Dept. of Ed; Dr. George H. Schauer, ELP Coordinator, Salt Lake City School Dist; Sarah J. Smith, GT Specialist, Minnesota Dept. of Ed; Cynthia A. Katte, GT Consultant, Rockford, IL; Kirk Winters, U.S. Dept. of Ed; Mary B. Maher, School 18, Troy, NY; Denice W. Hood, Illinois State Board of Ed; Teresa J. Rinker, Supervisor/Spec. Ed., Norristown, PA School Dist; R. M. Jordan, Lyndhurst, NJ; Irene Rasmussen, Phoenix; Judith B. Cunningham, Acting GT Coordinator, Allegheny Inter. Unit, Pittsburgh; Judy Ackermann, Ed. Service Center, Belleville, IL; Janice Bizzari, GT Coordinator, Monroe Cnty Schools, Bloomington, IN; Rose Willmann, Madison, WI Schools; Cathleen Waller, TAG Office, Prince George's Cnty Schools; Nancy Lubow, Quaker Town, PA; Patty Haasis, Mesa, AZ; Ilene Miller, Plantation, FL; Ella C. Schulz, Ft. Thomas Schools, Ft. Thomas, AZ.¶¶