

# GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS

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

## NEWSLETTER VOLUME FOUR, NUMBER ONE JANUARY-MARCH 1990

### HOLIDAY GREETINGS!

In 1727 Ben Franklin organized twelve like-minded individuals into a discussion group known as the Junto. Its primary goals were to increase philosophical and political knowledge, debate the important issues of the day, and improve understanding of friends and colleagues. Although it is impossible to reproduce the atmosphere of the Junto in this newsletter, the current issue attempts to create the spirit of Franklin's group by presenting articles and letters which engage the reader in a stimulating dialogue with the authors. We believe this information will improve gifted educators' awareness of the importance of: (1) supporting more opportunities for creative production in literature, music and the arts; (2) encouraging educational outlets for highly gifted girls; and (3) studying European history and philosophy to understand the origins of our government and the political earthquake caused in Eastern Europe by "glasnost" and "perestroika."

Our understanding of Franklin's Junto came from reading a wonderful periodical, The Concord Review (Summer 1989 issue), a quarterly review of essays by students of History. It is edited by Will Fitzhugh who is a former high school History teacher. Robert Kurtz wrote the article on Franklin when he was a high school junior at The Columbus Academy in Gahanna, Ohio. We highly recommend that all secondary educators of the gifted subscribe to this professional journal and use it to teach History. Write to the following address for information about the best endeavor we have seen to increase high school students' understanding of History: The Concord Review, P.O. Box 661, Concord, MA 01742.

The first article in this issue, written by Norman Cousins, discusses the problems which highly talented individuals have in exhibiting their works of art, getting their books published, and writing and performing their plays or musical compositions. Of course, Mr. Cousins has contributed greatly to the advancement of American arts and letters through his thirty-five year editorship of the Saturday Review. For the last ten years, he has studied the curative effects of positive attitudes on physical diseases and has written three books on this topic (the most recent one is Head First: The Biology of Hope, E.P. Dutton, 1989). He currently teaches at the UCLA School of Medicine. We thank Mr. Cousins for permission to reprint this article which originally appeared in the August 1, 1989 issue of The Christian Science Monitor. The second article by Sara F. Ketchum, who is now completing her doctoral studies at the University of Virginia, describes an outstanding program for gifted girls at Mary Baldwin College. Mike Walters (inspired by his recent trip to Belgium and the Netherlands) discusses the influence of European philosophy upon the political concepts of our founding fathers. His major point is that gifted students should learn that human thought and philosophical ideas have had and will continue to have profound effects upon our society and government. The letters from the Governor of North Carolina, Harry Passow, Virgil Ward, Herbert London, and William F. Buckley, Jr. make this "educational Junto" worthwhile for us. We hope it is for you also!

Maurice D. Fisher, Publisher

---

LET'S INVEST MORE IN THE 'LIFE OF THE MIND'  
BY NORMAN COUSINS, SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, UCLA  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

The procession is endless -- novelists, playwrights, opera singers, concert musicians, actors, ballet dancers, artists. All are reaching out for a chance to display their skills. New York and Los Angeles are the heartbreak headquarters. They come to these culture centers from all over the country in search of the "big opportunity." And all but a perilous few of them will be turned away.

Let me address myself to just one part of the parade of hopefuls -- the writers.

Some years ago, when I was editor of The Saturday Review, I would be asked about the quality of writing in America. I had to reply that I had no way of knowing because I didn't know how many fine novels were written but not published. Most new authors have the notion -- not illogically -- that if only they write a book good enough, publication will follow. But their manuscripts are returned unread because most publishers prefer to deal with literary agents or to rely on their own scouts.

They may receive recommendations from other authors. But the signal fact is that most publishers are not interested in unsolicited manuscripts.

Years ago, when Simon and Schuster was celebrating its 25th anniversary, the company actually boasted that every book was developed from within; that is, not a single manuscript came in "over the transom." When I asked Richard Simon whether this meant he had missed out on important unsolicited manuscripts routinely returned, he replied that it would be impossible for any book of genuine merit to go unrecognized by his firm.

It seemed to me the proposition might be worth testing. I had my secretary copy out the first two chapters of "War and Peace" which, accompanied by an outline of the rest of the book, was sent off to Simon and Schuster. It was returned several weeks later with a note saying it didn't fit into the firm's publishing plans. It was ironic that only a few weeks earlier Simon and Schuster had issued Tolstoy's classic in a new translation.

Thinking the rejection of "War and Peace" might be accidental, we typed 60 of Shakespeare's sonnets and shipped them off to S&S. Once again, the manuscript was returned, this time with a note referring to the difficulty of finding a market for poetry in America.

Not wanting to single out S&S, I suggested to students in a writing class that they copy out opening chapters accompanied by outlines of classics from the world's literature. Among the recent authors were Faulkner, Hemingway, Drieser, Thomas Wolfe, Sinclair Lewis. Past authors included Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Austen, Bronte, Moliere, Cooper, Dickens. Samples and outlines were sent off to some 22 book pub-

lishers, many of whom had issued the same books in original or reprint editions. All the submissions except one were returned unrecognized. The exception was Alfred A. Knopf who "rejected" a Faulkner manuscript with a note hoping that the person who submitted the work could stay out of jail.

It is undoubtedly true that the vast majority of unsolicited manuscripts are unpublishable. It is also true that some authors, like Sinclair Lewis, Norman Mailer, Betty Smith, and Elizabeth Jordan were finally able to find a home for their manuscripts after having been rejected by a dozen or more publishers. But the central fact is that uncounted authors of merit -- and we have no way of knowing who they are -- took the rejection notices as an authoritative evaluation of their work and gave up.

At a time when some "modern" painters are in high fashion and command tall prices for their work, thousands of artists of genuine talent have no outlet and try to sell through sidewalk exhibitions. An analogous situation exists in the other arts. The restaurants of Los Angeles are stocked with actors and actresses serving as waiters or entertainers. One enterprising restaurant in the city hires young opera singers to perform for its customers. The venture is commendable; the singers are nourished by the hope that some of the customers may be in a position to help. But such restaurants are not so much springboards to important careers as a dead end for most of the aspirants.

The condition of these performers is reminiscent of the poignant lot of their counterparts in the Soviet Union.

During recent travels in the Russian hinterland, I would attend concerts given by local artists. There were many thousands of these singers, instrumentalists, and dancers but only a precious few would make it all the way to the big cities and larger performing companies. Their destiny would be decided even more by local Communist party chiefs than by popular response to their talent. Life for them was largely a lottery and they had no way of breaking out of a closed circle.

I had to reflect that their melancholy situation was not so different from that being experienced by many American artists. While political factors may not figure in the fortunes of our own performers, sheer chance rather than ability often predominates.

The most valuable resources of nature are not minerals but human creativity. Yet a great deal of authentic talent in our country is going unused or unwanted. The losers are not just American artists but the entire culture. We can no more afford to squander creative splendor than petroleum or uranium or magnesium or agricultural products.

The National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities were designed to help prevent precisely this kind of costly waste, but the past decade has been marked by systematic government budget cutbacks in the arts. There is a fierce retreat from the notion that the life of the mind is important to a free society.



Academic Acceleration: The foundation of the PEG model is radical academic acceleration through high school and college. Students may begin the program at any point after the completion of the eighth grade and can receive their bachelor's degree in as few as five years. In their first year, students take specially-designed high school transition courses in English and American history which emphasize skills necessary to succeed in college work: writing, research, analysis, and oral communication. Depending on their level of preparation, first-year students may take college-level mathematics, science, and foreign language courses. Students generally take at least one college elective in their first year. They receive intensive academic support from the residential staff -- at least one meeting a week or more if necessary -- and are encouraged to use Mary Baldwin's Learning Skills Center for improvement in study skills. (Most students who enter PEG have not had to work hard to get good grades and thus have not developed appropriate study skills.)

At the end of their first year, PEG students take the G.E.D. in lieu of receiving a high school diploma. In their second year most students are enrolled at Mary Baldwin as full-time college students. Because Mary Baldwin has a low student/faculty ratio (12:1), students are easily able to arrange independent study with faculty members and receive considerable individual attention. Most choose their major by the third year and fulfill graduation requirements by their fifth year. Those who enter the program at an older age can finish in less time. Students may choose to remain at Mary Baldwin to receive a B.A. or transfer to another institution. PEG students have had great success in transferring and have been accepted at such institutions as Harvard, the University of Chicago, the University of Virginia, and the United States Naval Academy.

Many people question whether radical academic acceleration is appropriate; they fear students will have knowledge gaps if they do not complete the four-year sequence of high school. Researchers at the University of Virginia, headed by Dr. Carolyn Callahan, are examining the effects of acceleration on PEG students in a longitudinal study which uses a control group of gifted girls who have remained in high school. Observation of students in PEG suggests that the challenge offered by accelerated coursework prevents students from developing lazy study habits or turning off from school altogether. PEG has developed a suggested core curriculum of courses to ensure that students receive a strong foundation in the humanities, social sciences, mathematics, physical and biological sciences, and the arts.

Single Sex Environment: Gifted adolescent girls suffer the "double whammy" of being bright in a society which doesn't always value high intelligence and of being female in a society which still sets up barriers to women's achievement. PEG was established at a women's college to address the particular problems intelligent young women face inside and outside the classroom. Being in an all-female classroom

allows girls the freedom to be vocal and to be bright without fear of alienating boys. As one student writes, "with the absence of males in the classroom there's also an absence of pressure which comes from teenage guys and their being prone to ridicule when you do your best."

All students are expected to take leadership roles in PEG and at Mary Baldwin, where women of course fill all leadership positions. In their second year, PEG students take a required course entitled, "Issues of Women and Leadership," which explores the issues of barriers to achievement and encourages self-exploration. Students at Mary Baldwin also have the advantage of having many female role models, among them, the Director of PEG, Celeste Rhodes, and the current President of the College, Cynthia H. Tyson.

The single-sex environment does carry the disadvantage of students not being able to mix in a natural social environment with boys their own age. PEG makes every effort to plan social events for students to meet boys in appropriate situations -- students become involved in local community church youth groups, for example, and attend dances at local high schools or boys' private schools in the area. (The younger students are not allowed to attend college social events.)

Peer Group: Early college entrance is not a new concept: very able students have often entered college at a younger age. Unfortunately, these younger students, especially if they were living at the college, are usually socially isolated -- only serving to exacerbate their feelings of being different and out of synch.

PEG offers young girls the opportunity to take college courses at an early age while living with their peers. The peer support serves to strengthen each student's confidence and help students feel less isolated. Many PEG students have felt "like a chocolate cookie in a box of vanilla wafers" in their old schools. One student says, "I just didn't fit the other students' pattern. I was interested in learning. To many of them, school was just a place to see their friends." At PEG, they find other students like them. They are truly free to be themselves. Interestingly, the students who have been most successful at adapting to the environment of their junior high school or high school have the most difficult time shedding their shell when they arrive at PEG.

Supervision and Structure: PEG recognizes that young students living away from home require special support and guidance. The program is, in one student's words, "a chance to face the world with a hand to hold on to." The residential component at PEG is critical in ensuring that students adapt successfully to living in a college environment. Full-time, professional resident directors live in the PEG residence hall: they provide academic and emotional support to students and also plan program activities. Each student is assigned to a particular residential staff member: the student/staff ratio is 10:1. Students also meet twice a month in groups of eight to ten to discuss general program issues, social problems and other aspects of PEG life.

Students begin the program living in a structured environment where they are expected to follow reasonable guidelines for living -- observing study hours, going to bed at an appropriate time, etc. Consequences for breaking rules range from denial of visiting privileges to expulsion from the program. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions so that they may earn certain privileges -- sleeping late one morning a week when they don't have a class, for example. PEG also has a very active and effective student government and judicial system which also encourages respect for the program living guidelines. As students move through the program, they are able to assume more responsibility for their own living situation. By their fourth year, students live at large on the Mary Baldwin campus without adult supervision.

While the program will undoubtedly undergo additional changes in the future, the four key elements described above will remain the foundation of PEG -- the basis on which the program has built its success. Initial evidence shows that PEG works exceptionally well for students who are motivated to achieve and who have an overwhelming desire to learn. It is not appropriate for all gifted students. Despite the individual attention students receive, the program cannot address the specific problems of gifted underachievers or adapt for students who desire a very non-traditional learning environment. Program staff have also found that students who do not have adequate emotional support from their families have a difficult time coping with stresses involved in being part of an intensive academic program.

The best indicator of the success of the program is, of course, the success of its students. The first graduates of PEG at Mary Baldwin show great promise of fulfilling their ambitions with wisdom, confidence, and maturity. One student is attending graduate school in genetics at Baylor University. Another is at the University of Utah in the graduate mathematics program. Yet another has decided to take a year off before entering graduate school in linguistics -- she is working for a member of the Japanese parliament and will then travel halfway around the world to study in Wales.

Those involved in the development of PEG hope that the program model will be replicated and adapted at other institutions across the country, so that greater numbers of gifted young women can have the opportunity to learn, to feel comfortable with themselves, and to achieve their potential .

-----  
For further information about PEG, please contact Allison Young, Assistant Director for Program Advancement, Program for the Exceptionally Gifted, Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, Virginia 24401; (703) 887-7039.>>

()

Spinoza and Jefferson: A Study in Cultural Literacy

By Michael E. Walters, New York City Schools

"The most tyrannical governments are those which make crimes of opinions, for everyone has an inalienable right to his thoughts."

Baruch Spinoza

Theological-Political Treatise-1670

"We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable: that all men are created equal and independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent and inalienable, among which are the preservation of life and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Thomas Jefferson

Original draft-Declaration of Independence-1776

Much has been written recently about the lack of cultural literacy among American students. However, even these commentators fail to define cultural literacy in terms that demonstrate its relevance to American education. The relevance of cultural literacy is not merely to be a consumer or possessor of cultural facts. Rather it is a state of mind in which the individual is able to forge intellectual continuity. This intellectual continuum produces a sensibility related to human character.

The concept of democracy can only unfold in an environment that contains the proper cultural "antibodies." These are the psychological white blood cells that protect the body politic from various political "infections" such as hysteria, fanaticism, cynicism and despair, all of which can lead to mental tyranny and political despotism. Democracy is more than a method for selecting a national elite. It is the collective moral character of the populace that makes this process possible and stable. Gifted students need to have the type of cultural literacy that will enable them to ward off the cultural and political infections that can lead to the deconstruction of democracy.

In order for this sensibility to develop in the gifted mind, the cultural literacy curriculum must be based upon the study of human thought and emotion. A culturally literate individual must become aware of this continuum of human thought which derives from the struggle and endeavors of the Age of Enlightenment. The philosophical and moral traits of Thomas Jefferson were the legacy of such thinkers of this age as Baruch Spinoza.

Spinoza (1632-77) was a Dutch Jewish philosopher and an exemplar of the Age of Enlightenment. He represents the "man of reason," but reason in the special manner defined by Spinoza. According to this philosopher, human reason was not a mere game of academic abstraction, but thought combined with the refinement of personal emotion. To a thinker such as Spinoza, the need for freedom is innate to the human species. The tyrannical condition, as represented by totalitarianism,



causes humanity to be imprisoned in the dungeon of irrationality.

Spinoza's philosophy is the antithesis of a deconstructionist approach to human thought. It emphasizes that the mind and the cosmic pattern are a gestalt, and human thought cannot be expressed by reductionist formulas, such as those espoused by the deconstructionists. The thinker is not a sociological or behavioral category but represents a universal mind which penetrates and attempts to understand society and politics. Thought is an activity unto itself and the freedom to exercise thinking not only makes us human, but a part of the cosmic scheme. In addition, Spinoza believed that all life is vitality, including human thought and language, and that vitality is the wellspring of existence.

Jefferson and his colleagues took the philosophical sensibility of Spinoza and translated it into the needs of the New World. The foundation of American democracy is based upon the premise of the universality, uniqueness and necessity of human thought freed from the shackles of tyranny.

Gifted students need to be aware of their intellectual and cultural roots. The maintenance of democracy requires that thought is not to be taken for granted since it is our ability to think freely that makes us democratic in politics and in spirit.

The Berlin Wall has become irrelevant because the insight that Spinoza and Jefferson represented was not a material force. It was the human psyche reflecting upon itself, a transcendental power which no mortar, barbed wire, electric fence, guard dogs, or secret police can stop.>>

"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to my conscience, above all liberties."

John Milton-1644

\*\*\*\*\*

LETTERS REGARDING ARTICLES WHICH APPEARED IN THE  
OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1989 ISSUE

FROM JAMES G. MARTIN, GOVERNOR OF NORTH CAROLINA

Thank you for your thoughtful letter regarding North Carolina's gifted education program and for the copy of your latest edition of the Gifted Education Press Newsletter.

I have taken the liberty of sharing this information with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. We are all certainly proud of Linda Weiss Morris' report and the untiring efforts of the North Carolina Association for the Gifted and Talented. This association is a true asset to the students of our state.>>

---

FROM A. HARRY PASSOW, JACOB H. SCHIFF PROFESSOR, TEACHERS COLLEGE,  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

I enjoyed Linda Weiss Morris' article on the history of education of the gifted in North Carolina and felt it was balanced and informative. Your introduction, however, speaks of saluting two academic stars -- Virgil Ward and Jim Gallagher -- both of whom have made substantial contributions to education of the gifted in North Carolina, the USA, as well as abroad. I misunderstood your saluting Virgil and Jim in the sense that I thought that Dr. Morris' article was going to review their influence on the education of the gifted in North Carolina. I say "misunderstood" because there is, unless I missed it, no mention of their contribution except for your introductory paragraph. The "non-credit" curriculum at the Governor's School was created by Virgil Ward. Jim has been very much involved in the School of Science and Mathematics. I don't mean to "take away" from this article but I wish more had been said about Virgil's and Jim's contributions.

Having been involved in research on grouping for almost three decades now (see M. L. Goldberg, A. H. Passow and J. Justman, THE EFFECTS OF ABILITY GROUPING, Teachers College Press, 1966), I appreciate Paul Plowman's article ("Mediocrity or Excellence?") but wish the issues were as clear and concise as he makes them. We can "value and support excellence" without necessarily interpreting "whenever possible, homogeneous groups for GATE students should be provided" to mean that homogeneous groups are always possible and the only way to provide for the gifted. I agree with Paul Plowman that his message must sink in that "You don't train..." but do not view it as a "gemstone of conciseness in arguing for placing gifted students together in a self-contained program to give them the best possible education." [publisher's intro.] I do not think that Plowman makes that argument nor do I believe that he intends to make that argument. The issue regarding "Mediocrity or Excellence" is not the same as the issue of homogeneous/heterogeneous grouping -- which is only a part of the larger issue and I think Plowman says that.

I had seen Michael Walters' article before and think his argument for the study of the literature of the Spanish speaking world certainly has considerable merit. That the gifted should have access to themes and images with cultural diversity so that they have a greater respect and understanding of the heritage of Western civilization and the human condition seems very clear to me and Spanish literature represents one approach to this.

My colleague, Diane Ravitch wisely shifts -- in my view -- the argument to the need for gifted children and all children to read "the kind of literature that helps youngsters understand the difference between what is fine and what is dross" from the debate over the Stanford reading list or any other list of "classics." I hope your readers recognize this.>>> We should have said, "the Morris article

---

presents a description of major legislation and programs rather than the contributions of specific individuals to gifted education in North Carolina. The publisher/editor of this newsletter would like to acknowledge the important work of Ward and Gallagher there." We also agree that the main thrust of Paul Plowman's article is to stress the importance of establishing quality programs for the gifted rather than only self-contained classrooms. MDF>>

FROM VIRGIL S. WARD, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Dr. Morris correctly and pridefully identifies a number of stellar and leading projects and institutions which the state of North Carolina has decidedly been in the forefront. Calling these "beacons," she highlights first the prototypic Governor's School of North Carolina, established under the gubernatorial tenure of now U.S. Senator, the Hon. Terry Sanford, and the powerful drive of his educational protagonist, novelist John Ehle, at Salem College in Winston-Salem by means of a precedent breaking three-year (formative years, 1963-65) developmental period under corporate funding; and second, the School of the Arts (drama, music, painting) also in Winston-Salem; and third, the eminently successful specialized school, the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, established in 1980, and reminiscent of the earlier Bronx High School of Science in New York City.

Now, while all of these signal advancements in the field of Differential Education for the Gifted (DEG) stand in history as worthy models (both the comprehensive and the special interest institutions), Dr. Morris is less than critically enlightening in her treatment of program and curricular theory, which is of course the heart and soul of extraordinary outreach toward young people with extraordinary talents. She identifies a number of initiatives among the local school divisions, all of which are exemplary in ways not truly contributory to the science and theory of DEG. It is trusted that Dr. Morris and her commendably activist Association will through their own wisdom and in their own way, also become active in theory development, even as they continue to do the functional things in the here and now.>>

FROM WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR., EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, NATIONAL REVIEW AND HOST OF FIRING LINE

One had been wondering when someone would get around to noticing George Eliot and Jane Austen. The two articles you mentioned were very good indeed, although both authors exhibited a worrisome lack of self-awareness. Their own standards of scholarship, their terms of discourse, are gifts of a tradition that Dr. Ravitch, especially, doesn't seem to see as threatened. Having taken their gamma globulin, she and Mr. Walters have forgotten why the natives ought to learn

