

# GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS

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## NEWSLETTER

VOLUME ONE, NUMBER 1      APRIL 1987

This newsletter will serve as a forum for discussing current issues on educating the gifted, and it will attempt to present the best possible ideas concerning how to improve this field. It will also seek to break certain stereotypes which are so prevalent today by offering alternative proposals concerning identification, teaching methods and curriculum. Some of these stereotypes are: Current instructional and program models will solve all or most of the problems of educating the gifted. Gifted programs can be successfully implemented by using games and workbooks. The direct teaching of thinking skills is an essential component of programs for the gifted. Traditional subject areas are not suitable to the needs of today's gifted students. Creativity training is a necessary and important component of all programs for the gifted. Teachers of the gifted should have an education degree.

Although our proposed solutions might have as many problems as those methods and approaches currently in vogue, our primary goal is to stimulate a questioning attitude toward gifted education issues. We intend to encourage the type of thinking among educators of the gifted which they are supposed to develop in students, i.e., an inquiring attitude-of-mind, and an appreciation of innovative ideas and debate.

An example of a serious problem of knowledge and literacy we will address is: How should teachers develop in their gifted students the continuity of ideas and concepts underlying Western civilization and intellectual thought? Because of a lack of emphasis on studying specific works of history, literature, and the arts and sciences from ancient times to the present era, gifted students do not develop an understanding of the historical roots of current ideas from literature and other areas of study. What type of curriculum is necessary for effectively developing these connections in the gifted?

We welcome your comments, rebuttals and concise articles (a maximum length of two pages); we are particularly interested in publishing information about humanities and strong subject matter oriented programs. Our dates for issuing future editions of this newsletter will be on an "intermittent" schedule until we obtain sufficient feedback from readers.

If you would like your friends or colleagues to receive copies of this publication, please send us their names and addresses. At the present time, there is no charge for receiving it. We will also be happy to send information about our books on educating the gifted -- just let us know.

Maurice D. Fisher, Publisher

**DEVELOPING A RIGOROUS CURRICULUM FOR THE GIFTED: A PRESSING NEED**

By James LoGiudice, Supervisor Programs for the Gifted  
Bucks County, Pennsylvania Intermediate Unit 22

Much too frequently, one answer for teaching gifted students in school is to simply give more work, or insist on the completion of tasks and assignments at a faster rate. Another approach educators take with these students is the "bread and circus" one, where the gifted are kept busy with activities which are more entertaining than educational. Both approaches widely miss the mark of what gifted students should expect and receive from an educational program.

In an essay entitled, The Uses of an Education (The Wall Street Journal, May 25, 1979), Edmund Fuller warned a graduating class of seniors that:

It is possible that you may become the best-informed generation in history -- quantitatively. It is also frighteningly possible that you could turn out to be one of the worst educated generations -- qualitatively. There have been times when far fewer people were educated, but when those few received an education in depth unmatched today. You could be cursed with information without wisdom, with data without direction. You could wind up programming machines without knowing the implications of their use, naively handling instruments more sophisticated than yourselves.

As educators directly concerned with educating the gifted, our primary purpose must be to implement programs with both academic substance and rigor. Gifted students need from their teachers, principals and program coordinators the type of classwork, assignments and curricula which build on interdisciplinary content. This content is related to significant conceptual issues and it uses challenging and structured learning activities -- ones that emphasize the thoughtful use of knowledge to take bright minds beyond the "fun-and-fluff" curriculum.

The gifted curriculum should be derived from broad, overarching concepts. For example, when helping students to realize the complex relationships between the sciences and humanities, we are not going to cause insight or "wise" understanding by simply heaping on beleaguered students enormous amounts of data and literature from each discipline. Instead, they should be led through the actual writings of major scientists, poets, novelists, essayists, and social critics which

relate to important concepts.

The gifted program staff of the Bucks County Intermediate Unit, Doylestown, PA, has developed and is actively expanding such conceptual models for secondary level students. These models combine academically rigorous learning activities with broad, underpinning concepts. For example, a unit of study entitled, Technology and Man: The Humanities and Science, focuses on reading topics and student work around five concepts:

1. Innovative scientific theories and discoveries have changed man's perception of himself and his world.
2. The humanities and sciences need to be examined as interrelated disciplines because whatever occurs in these fields affect each other.
3. Today's dilemmas lead to a search for solutions based on knowledge of the role of technology, the humanities, the sciences, and the connections between them.
4. Man will always face a conflict between the needs of the present versus his dreams for the future.
5. Scientific technology, tempered by the humanities, needs to be carefully examined and critiqued in order to improve the quality of life.

An example of follow-up work to these concepts should include reading books by Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, becoming familiar with selections from major social and ethical philosophers, and gathering data about advancements in medical technology and research. These topics should also be presented in a seminar format which includes rigorous discussions and assignments.

This approach to educating the gifted means hard work for both teachers and students. It also requires the analysis of relevant and critical literature, and development of skills in organizing ideas for understanding by others. Yet, these concepts and activities are essential elements in gifted programs of substance, and the key to wisdom and moral sensibility. >>

**WHAT CURRENT BRAIN RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT GIFTEDNESS**

By Michael E. Walters      Consultant on Gifted Education  
New York City Public Schools

There are really only two major concerns of differential education for the gifted: The first is to seek a valid definition of giftedness, and the second is to conceive a *raison d'etre* for differential education. Dr. Richard Bergland's stimulating book, The Fabric of Mind: A Radical New Understanding of the Brain and How it Works (Viking Press, 1985), develops the idea that the right hemisphere has a greater role in thinking than previously believed by brain scientists. While recognizing the standard function of the left hemisphere for abstract thought, he elaborates upon the cognitive organization and intertwined affective components of the other hemisphere.

Bergland conceives the brain as being a glandular organ stimulated by numerous hormones. This conception leads to completely different ideas about thinking processes and personality development than the predominant one which says the brain is a transmitter of electrical impulses that determine sensations and thoughts. For example, the glandular model would cause scientists to identify and regulate (through the ventricles) various brain chemicals in order to improve students' learning abilities and cure patients' neurological diseases. Bergland also argues that the electrical model of the brain has steered researchers in the wrong direction (for the last 100 years) in understanding its workings, and has produced little valid information about neurological diseases.

In this book, the author distinguishes between two types of gifted thinkers: One is the above average thinker who has exceptional abilities to solve abstract problems and is primarily influenced by the left hemisphere. The other is a thinker who is more concerned with asking the right questions than obtaining correct solutions to problems -- this individual is more influenced by the right hemisphere. This quester after the truth deals with problems in an interdisciplinary manner and possesses a holistic style of inquiry.

Most differential education programs are usually geared toward the left hemisphere thinker. Therefore, the right hemisphere, creative and potentially iconoclastic thinker is being "undereducated" or ignored by these programs. This situation is both an irony and a paradox because the holistic thinker produces the great leaps in human knowledge. Individuals such as Socrates (the greatest questioner of all time), Dante, Goethe, Freud and Einstein are clearcut examples of right cortex thinkers who followed the gestalt problem solving principle which states: "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." They were truly the great seekers of the truth and shakers of the human psyche.

Unfortunately, the typical differential education curriculum fails to appreciate and grasp this mental style and sensibility.

The above concerns for proper definition and purpose of differential education are interrelated. The previously mentioned significance of the right hemisphere suggests the type of program which should be offered to the gifted. These seekers after the Big Questions have a sensibility and value system which emphasizes the discovery of meaning and relationships between information and data. However, their questioning sensibility and values are included within a hierarchy of goals for achieving self-actualization. Therefore, the differential education curriculum should develop and expand this self-actualization process. >>

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THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING THEATRE AND THE HISTORY OF DRAMA  
TO GIFTED STUDENTS\*

By Phyllis Girard Teacher of Secondary Level Gifted Students  
Bucks County, Pennsylvania Intermediate unit 22

Gifted students on the secondary level need to be challenged by courses of study which recognize their specific learning needs and encourage them to strive for excellence. The study of theatre is one discipline which allows these students to think critically, question and evaluate ideas, conduct meaningful studies, and imagine, create and explore new areas of thought. Through the artistic process, they will gain an awareness of both the intellectual and emotional components of their personality. Their individual perceptions will increase as they become more conscious of aesthetics and the creative process. Through the study of drama, gifted students will learn about human values and the human condition by examining the universal truths which link peoples, civilizations, and cultures of the world. They will also gain insight into the influence of different cultures and stylistic periods on the theatre, past and present. In addition, when these students become actively involved in the artistic process, they will begin to expand their own creativity by expressing their thoughts and ideas in original and imaginative ways.

\*Based upon Dr. Girard's forthcoming book on teaching theatre to the gifted. GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS will publish this book in the spring of 1987.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the theatre, a play can blend the arts with literature, philosophy, and the social and natural sciences (all disciplines which contribute to man's humanity). Therefore, a play which successfully achieves this blending should not be viewed (or read) as just an individual work of literature. The playwright responds to his social milieu by mirroring and questioning values. Consequently, a play reflects the playwright's personal interpretation of man's search for meaning, both realistically and symbolically. The playwright's depiction of human experiences addresses philosophical issues and questions, and also explores ethical and aesthetic values in an interdisciplinary manner. Furthermore, through the characters he develops, the playwright is able to reveal the inner consciousness and outer reality, while blending intellectual and emotional characteristics. The theatre is an art form which can lead students to philosophy and the discipline of aesthetics -- and finally to the artistic process itself. How an artist imagines and creates the study of theatre and its dramatic literature should be read and critically analyzed by gifted students. >>

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#### WHO SUCCEEDS?\*

By Alice R. Dunkle      Educational Writer and Science Educator  
Great Falls, Virginia

A young boy with no father begins earning his own dinner at age six, excels at his studies, works his way through law school and eventually becomes a Supreme Court Justice. A young girl attends fourteen different rural schools and grows up to become a famous educator. The son of a poor farmer with a third grade education receives a doctorate from a fine university and becomes a famous leader and television personality. Do these individuals share any common characteristics? Is there any way to account for such unusual accomplishment?

One way to find answers to these and other questions is to read what successful individuals have written about themselves in their autobiographies and other books they have written about their careers.

\*Dr. Dunkle has completed a book on this topic which will be published by GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS in the spring of 1987.

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This technique was used to study and compare the lives of forty highly successful individuals, and the observations are compiled in this book. Certain questions were used as guides for this study. For example, is success a matter of being born into an already successful family and of continuing a tradition in a particular field? Is it related to family structure, to discipline or values taught by the family, to the social environment provided by the family? How important is education? Religion? How and when do individuals choose a career? How do successful individuals account for their unusual success? How does the choice of a career fit an individual's way of viewing the world and his or her role in it? How much success was experienced during an individual's lifetime and what were the rewards of that success?

Many of the writers provided answers to these questions in their own words, but the answers were not always there. Some individuals, for example, made no mention of religion, some said little about their early years, and some indicated little about their late years. Despite omissions here and there, it is possible to see similarities and differences, to make comparisons, to see the relative importance of certain factors. There are also some unusual and unique insights into the lives of successful people, their views of the world and the factors that led to success.

Perhaps the greatest benefit to be gained by reading about successful individuals is an insight into oneself. It is possible to identify with certain individuals or characteristics, or to recognize that one does not fit into one category or another. This may be useful in understanding one's own personal development, training and educating of children, or personal relationships. Recognizing perhaps, that a child prefers to be alone, prefers to build or read rather than play with other children, may be more acceptable when we realize that many successful people showed similar preferences in childhood. It may be useful for an adult to recognize that some successful individuals did not see their talents until adulthood, and that others who had early successes, later had failures. Many of the insights into their own careers provided by successful individuals are useful to those trying to make some sense of their own lives; in addition, many of these observations are simply interesting to read about. There are numerous routes to success, but this study shows that certain factors, personality traits, and patterns are more common than others among successful people. >>

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**BOOK REVIEW****Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse In The Age Of Show Business** by Neil Postman (Viking Press, 1985).

This is a very thoughtful and provocative book which every educator of the gifted should read. Unfortunately, it has not received as much comment and notoriety as it deserves by educators and the press. Postman, a Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences at New York University, argues that television has presented Western civilization and American society (in particular) with the strongest imminent threat to their existence as literate and rational cultures. He also says it is not the totalitarian state of Orwell's 1984 which we should fear. Instead, the more benign society of Huxley's Brave New World is closer to modern-day America. Huxley's world lulled its citizens into dumbness and mental atrophy through the insidious use of rewards and the pleasure principle.

Postman describes how our print culture of the last three thousand years is being demolished by the visually-oriented and non-literate world of television. However, he goes beyond Marshall McLuhan's descriptions of how different media affect our perceptions of and thinking about the world. He provides the reader with excellent examples of how television has seriously affected the quality of education and literacy, attention levels, political discourse, and the level of thinking and conversation today as compared to Abraham Lincoln's time. Regarding these declines, he says:

Today, we must look to the city of Las Vegas, Nevada, as a metaphor of our national character and aspiration, its symbol a thirty-foot-high cardboard picture of a slot machine and a chorus girl. For Las Vegas is a city entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment, and as such proclaims the spirit of a culture in which all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment. Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death.

Although Postman offers little optimism about improving this situation, he does say that solutions will come only after the careful study of the history of communications, and analysis of the problems of thinking and sensibility caused by communications media. According to this author, high school courses in these areas are almost nonexistent:



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Our schools have not yet even got around to examining the role of the printed word in shaping our culture. Indeed, you will not find two high school seniors in a hundred who could tell you -- within a five-hundred-year margin of error -- when the alphabet was invented. I suspect most do not even know that the alphabet was invented....

To help increase understanding of the effects of media on our society, secondary level programs for the gifted should use Postman's book in a course which studies such topics as: (1) the history of the alphabet and communications media; and (2) the impact of the printing press, books, the telegraph, newspapers, magazines, recordings, radio and television on the individual's thinking and perception. As Postman indicates, most citizens do not understand the problems covered in his book because media such as radio and television are too much a part of their lives. By engaging in rigorous study and reflection concerning the history and impact of media upon their lives, gifted students may become interested in the communications area as a subject for in-depth, professional study and career development. Clearly, such students are greatly needed by American society to discover creative solutions to the problems discussed in this book. >>

**Maurice D. Fisher**

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