

Virgil S. Ward, et al., The Gifted Student:
A Manual for Program Improvement. Atlanta:
Southern Regional Education Board, 1962.

Excerpt

BASIC CONCEPTS

The development of those phases of the total school program which comprise proper education for the gifted demands intelligent thought and skillful development. In this section of the *Manual*, some fundamental concepts which will be needed by all who engage in any part of these endeavors are introduced. The intention is not necessarily to provide definitions in the exact form to which every local school should subscribe, but rather to provide certain educational and psychological concepts from which as a point of departure, each responsible educational group can think through its own needs, problems, policies, and practices. Close consideration of these concepts should aid substantially in the understanding of the various discussions of curriculum and programmatic arrangements in the sections which follow.

Some basic considerations pertaining to the nature of human abilities are presented first; a limited number of generally applicable concepts which pertain both to psychological abilities and to educational provisions designed to bring them to fruition, next; and finally, some general features—"cardinal principles"—which the SRPEG participants observed to characterize the more excellent of the programs observed in the various sections of the nation, and hence to be essential to any serious or ambitious program.

A. THE NATURE OF GIFTEDNESS

The rationale of differential education for the gifted, as has been indicated, involves the belief that identifiable groups of children with

high abilities exist for whom different kinds of educational provisions are necessary to equality of educational opportunity. Such groups of children, endowed with various kinds of superior abilities, have been diversely termed "superior and talented", "the able and ambitious", "the academically talented" and other familiar designations. For convenience, all these may be and are in this *Manual* referred to as "the gifted".

The behavioral sciences recognize certain definable qualities around which subgroups of individuals with superior potential may be categorized with varying degrees of reliability for the purpose of special education. Clearest among these qualities are giftedness in:

1. *General Intelligence*, usually manifest in high IQ scores and
2. *Specific Aptitudes* (or talents), as measured by valid tests appropriately designated, or as evidenced through remarkable insights and skills in particular areas of knowledge or human endeavor.

Aptitudes are regarded as specific behavioral efficiencies, usually accompanied by above average general intelligence. These special abilities may be inferred through superior performance in subject areas such as mathematics and foreign languages, in skilled interpersonal relations which make for social leadership, in various forms of artistic expression such as music, dance or painting and in still other particular kinds of behavior.

Within both of these categories of giftedness, general intelligence and specific aptitude, it is practicable to recognize that *degrees* of superiority exist, such that school provisions may be devised respectively to meet the needs of those small numbers singularly exceptional in ability (e.g. one per cent or less), and the broader numbers (e.g. two, five, or ten per cent as variously suggested) still sufficiently above average to justify substantially modified educational procedures. In 1950 the Educational Policies Commission recognized two such levels of intellectual giftedness and identified these in terms of given intelligence quotients. Other organizations and individuals have similarly recognized varying degrees of giftedness in terms of I.Q., specific cutoff points beginning sometimes essentially where the usual demarcation for the upper limit of the "normal" or "average" group occurs. This recognition of levels of variation, of course, applies in substance also to the various aptitudes and to other recognizable clusters of abilities.

What is important to recognize is that any cutoff point on any measured psychological trait is by its nature arbitrary, and that no given demarcation can be defended on grounds of biological or psychological science. The search is for that degree of deviation in behavioral characteristics, comprising a potential for productive learning and thinking, which is so far above average that the graded materials and normal procedures devised for the education of children

in the majority are less suited than curricular arrangements that can be deliberately devised to develop the exceptional qualities.

At the present time behavioral scientists are making significant efforts to distinguish other behavioral attributes worthy of special educational attention. Creativity, productive thinking as distinct from reproductive, and divergent thinking as opposed to convergent, are concepts representing attempts to isolate, define, and measure additional significant qualities of mind which relate to giftedness. The development of creativity is now being seen increasingly as a worthy educational objective. As these important behavioral characteristics become sufficiently well established at the levels of behavioral science, educators can and should devote particular thought to their appropriate development.

Finally, it must be recognized that certain aspects of personality, such as motivation, value orientation and cultural background weigh heavily in identifying particular individuals whose present behavioral patterns seem to promise superior performance in the future. Constructive combinations of these aspects of personality in persons of lesser relative ability may lead to higher ultimate attainment. On the other hand, even among youth of high ability-potential, aspects of personality arising from unfortunate experience may combine to hamper present performance, leading to *underachievement* or *emotional instability*. In the case of these gifted children, remediation should be undertaken as an initial phase of differential education in order subsequently to allow fuller operation of the natural potential. What is patently inexcusable is to exclude such children from developed provisions which promise to remove the obstacles to their "self actualization".

Remarkable demonstrations on the part of children in contemporary schools have been noted during the present wave of interest in the problems of the gifted. Reading, self-taught, prior to the age permitting entry into school; successful learning of higher mathematics on the part of elementary school youngsters; brilliant examples of children's insights into social and philosophical issues, and other striking manifestations of remarkable ability have occurred too consistently and too frequently to ignore. Such behavior suggests a potential for learning and thought hitherto undreamed of and defiant of management within the standard patterns and processes of education which serve children of ordinary abilities. Reliable studies indicate further that prodigious childhood accomplishments tend, on the whole, to be followed in adulthood by similarly constructive behavior through which creative inventions in the arts and sciences occur, and advances in human welfare are made by gifted statesmen and leaders in social thought. These facts and realizations suggest further the absolute urgency that persons in possession of such priceless human assets be identified early and treated with every resource available to the educator.

Specific expressive behaviors which characterize the gifted may be detailed in lists that number into the dozens. These particular behavioral traits, however, derive from a more manageable number of broader psychological variables which serve typically to distinguish the group. The following categories embrace most of the educationally significant behaviors of gifted individuals as they are presently recognized.

Capacity for Learning: Accurate perception of social and natural situations; independent, rapid, efficient learning of fact and principle; fast, meaningful reading, with superior retention and recall.

Power and Sensitivity of Thought: Ready grasp of principles underlying things as they are; sensitivity to inference in fact, consequence of proposition, application of idea; spontaneous elevation of immediate observations to higher planes of abstraction; imagination; meaningful association of ideas; forceful reasoning; original interpretations and conclusions; discriminatory power, quick detection of similarities and differences among things and ideas; able in analysis; synthesis, and organization of elements; critical of situations, self, and other people.

Curiosity and Drive: Mental endurance; tenacity of purpose; stubbornness, sometimes contrarily expressed as reluctance to do as directed; capacity for follow-through with extensive, but meaningful plans; curiosity about things and ideas; intrinsic interest in the challenging and difficult; versatile and vital interests; varied, numerous and penetrating inquiries; boredom with routine and sameness.

From these basic considerations as to the nature of giftedness, the local school may devise serviceable definitions for those groups of youngsters in whose interest they intend to develop specifically applicable school procedures. Starting efforts will perhaps wisely center upon the most clearly known deviant characteristics, i.e., general intellectual superiority, and those for which the clearest educational processes pertain. The identification of groups may be expanded as the program matures to include other kinds of abilities and larger numbers of children. A fair understanding of these concepts on the nature of giftedness will be essential to the establishment of adequate screening and identification procedures in the process of selecting and placing children, and to the broader and more nearly ultimate search for educational provisions exactly geared to each group distinguishable through deviant characteristics.

B. A GLOSSARY OF FUNCTIONAL TERMINOLOGY

Terminology can both facilitate and deter progress. The following concepts have been selected for their functional value in thinking through the various problems arising in the accomplishment of a

recognizable pattern of provisions for fortunately atypical youth. As with all the "basic concepts" in this section, it is not intended that given school personnel should accept verbatim the definitions offered. The fine arguments necessary for obtaining agreements at such a level of particularity would quite possibly tend rather to impede than to propel the changes integral to a good program. On the other hand, careful study of these deliberated descriptions and explanations on the part of every staff member to be involved in discussions about or responsibilities in the program, should assure some communality of sound understanding around which both thought and action may proceed. Reasoned departures from what is here suggested by way of definitions should be, and quite possibly can be, defensible in terms of more refined insights into educational or psychological processes, or in terms of practical contingencies governing a school's initial efforts to establish or to improve upon its differential provisions for youth of superior abilities. Such departures should not, however, reflect simple bias of person or of locality.

Ability Grouping: Also sometimes called "segregation." The practice of assembling or deploying students for instructional purposes who are somewhat nearer together in general capacity for learning, or in given specific aptitudes, so that instruction and learning may proceed at a pace and in terms of qualities suited to this (these) capacities. Contrasts with those forms of grouping which utilize chronological age or alphabet as criteria for homogeneity and developmental readiness. May take the form of special classes, special schools, multiple track curricula, etc., and may be arranged for part or for all of the school curriculum. Specific capacities for differing areas of knowledge or skill, with interests related thereto, are recognized as superior criteria for grouping, as opposed to general indices (e.g. composite I.Q.) applied across the range of school activities.

Acceleration: Any administrative practice designed to move the student through school more rapidly than usual. Includes such practices as early admission, grade-skipping, advanced placement, telescoping of grade levels, credit by examination, etc.

Articulation: The sequential arrangement of studies through the total school program so as to avoid undesirable repetition or duplication at various grade levels. Problems of articulation often arise when programs for the gifted are planned to affect given school years but not to encompass the entire graded sequence.

Differential Education (for the gifted): Educational experiences uniquely or predominantly suited to the distinguishing behavioral processes of intellectually superior people and to the adult roles that they typically assume as leaders and innovators. Then successfully arranged to involve the capacities and needs of the gifted, the experience (concepts, studies, activities, courses) by definition is beyond the reach of and not appropriate to the capacities and needs of persons

not exceptionally endowed with potential for learning and productive or creative behavior.

Enrichment (for the gifted): Practices which are intended to increase the depth or breadth of the gifted student's learning experiences. May include special assignments, independent study, individual projects, small group work, and other adaptations of routine school processes. This purported form of provision for the gifted often in fact merely camouflages do-nothingness. (See also Differential Education.)

Identification: The process of finding those students who meet the criteria of giftedness adopted in a given school or system. Identification should begin as early as possible, should be systematic, i.e., follow a defensible plan, and should be continuous, so as to improve the chances of discovering larger numbers of youth qualified for differential education. A variety of techniques exist for screening the pupil population, most of which have some virtue, and no one of which—particularly a single measure of intelligence—is sufficient alone.

Mental Ability: An inclusive term, more properly referred to as "capacity", and including such conceptions as intelligence and aptitude (talent) and related processes such as creativity, productive thinking, divergent thinking, etc. For a discussion of these essential concepts, see "The Nature of Giftedness" earlier in this section of Part II.

Mental Tests: Devices such as intelligence, aptitude, achievement, and personality tests, or rating scales for various skills, which are designed to provide relatively objective means of assessing or comparing certain of the capacities of characteristics of individuals.

Motivation: The basic psychological process involved in both under- and over-achievement in school. A subtle and complex literature on this aspect of personality exists in the behavioral sciences. As concerns the gifted, *underachievement* is recognized as a critical problem, and is thought of as a failure to perform as well as might be expected from scores on tests of aptitude or intelligence. No agreement exists as to how poorly a student must do, for how long, or in what activities, in order to be called an underachiever. Poor performance by gifted youngsters is not infrequently paralleled by singular out-of-school activities which possess intrinsic appeal to the child.

Program (of special education): A pattern of provisions within the total range of school activities which is designed to meet the distinguishable needs and abilities of intellectually superior and talented children. Single or scattered provisions such as advanced placement or early admission to first grade do not alone constitute a *program*. (See also Differential Education.)

C. TEN CARDINAL PRINCIPLES

From a thoughtful review of all that was studied, attended, and observed, certain features which seem to characterize the more excellent programs of education for gifted youngsters appear to be mandatory in an ideal situation. These cardinal tenets, each excellently implemented, will be found all together only in the rarest and most favored of school systems. On the other hand, unless the more modestly endowed school can show tangible evidence that it has realized as effectively as its circumstances permit each one of these ten disciplines to thought and practice, the chances are good that its claims toward differentiated education for the gifted are merely illusory.

Imaginative local school personnel in systems not yet really "off the ground" in this important respect may sense from a thoughtful perusal of these ten principles many of the particulars which will devolve upon them in developing educational services for supremely educable young people. For those school leaders already having substantially accomplished such special provisions in the total school program, the principles can serve as a broad check-list for systematic re-examination of its endeavors, and for improving those phases of the program revealed through the analysis to be less than what the school is capable of doing.

1. *Particularization of Objectives.* A philosophy of education which a given school might have adopted, and general objectives related thereto, provide a basis for the formulation of more specific realizations concerning the nature and needs of those deviant groups identified by the school for differential provisions. These statements may take the form of particularized process goals, in order to distinguish them from general objectives of education for all youth. Such explicitly declared objectives should take account (1) of the exceptional abilities of the children intended to be reached—priceless abilities, sloughed off and neglected in the past—which point to potential for learning not yet dreamed of in the typical American school; (2) of the anticipated social roles which these youth characteristically assume as adults—leadership and reconstruction of the culture as distinct from simple participation therein; and (3) of the implications for these young people of the dramatic nature of the world in which they will spin out their lives as cultural frontiersmen—a material world rapidly being made all over by science and technology, and a social world characterized by close, but not necessarily friendly, interrelationships among interest groups of various kinds, and among nations, some of which are only presently emerging as powers on the world scene. Differential education for differentially endowed youth must take exacting account of all these demands in order to be adequate in more than name alone. Such particularized

objectives for identifiable segments of the total pupil population are not only harmonious with democratic philosophies of education that are general in scope, but are essential to the fullness of these philosophies. (See further Section Five, D.)

2. *Staff Training and Responsibility.* The typical school staff can scarcely hope to have within its ranks personnel already knowledgeable and skilled in the various phases of a program of education for the gifted. A wise selection of persons capable of the requisite learnings, and of skill in putting these understandings into practice, is a necessary early step, i.e. selection and then training. Training should be geared to the functions intended. These will cover a variety of needs, including excellence on the part of teachers in the challenging tasks of face-to-face instructional leadership and classroom management, imagination and reasoned thought in the development of curricular materials geared toward the specific task, and administrative ingenuity in leading staff and community through changes in habituated conceptions and established practices. Such staff training should be a bootstrap operation in the hands of committees of local personnel *only* when qualified consultative resources are *not* available. The costs are diverse and substantial when initial errors are made, though these are committed in good faith, and the efforts subsequently necessary for correcting concepts, materials, and actions mis-directed in the beginning are usually greater than what would have been involved in more adequately founded origins.

The time-honored administrative principle of clear designation of responsibility, with commensurate authority, in single persons pertains to this aspect of school practice. According to size and resources, single persons must be designated within the school system as responsible for leading in the hierarchy of functions essential to full-scale endeavor. A single head for system-wide collective efforts, one responsible to the building principal for the efforts of a given school, and further reasonable divisions of functions covering grade levels and subject matter will usually be indicated. Supervisory and guidance personnel must also be made clearly aware of their responsibilities in the special endeavor. In most schools of no greater than average size, it will likely be that these responsibilities are placed in the hands of persons who must continue to carry other duties as well. In any case, the assignment of responsibility is but an idle gesture unless corresponding time and provisions for implementing the required work are established in the process. The more thoroughly each person understands his function, has the requisite personal abilities to carry them out, and the time required for working in essentially uncharted territory, the more nearly adequate will the local program be.

3. *Community Interpretation.* Small and simple adjustments in the routine machinery of school operation will but mock the task at hand. Practices which will break with custom on numerous counts

are much more likely to be sensed as necessary by the staff that takes this problem seriously. Ingenuity in interpreting these requisite changes to the community is needed. Forthrightness, perseverance, and patience pay good dividends in this respect, paving the way for active cooperation from resources outside the school setting, and for support by the majority of thoughtful citizens. Especially critical will be the school personnel's ability to obtain support on the part of those parents whose children are not destined to be involved in the highlighted efforts. If differentiated educational provisions for the gifted are shown to parallel provisions for the handicapped, and for groups with already recognized special abilities, as in athletics and music, and if the arguments are clearly made that the established educational program provides for the majority of youngsters according to their needs and capacities, this kind of community support can be developed.

4. *Systematic Pupil Identification.* A differentiated program of education cannot attain appropriate particularity without the tangible identification of persons to be involved in it. Explicit definitions, a knowledgeable utilization of existing psychological instruments, and a judicious involvement of the judgment of personnel closely acquainted with potential candidates for the program are essential to adequate processes of pupil identification. The identification process should begin in the primary grades, and extend continuously throughout the secondary school at least. Children mature and make manifest certain potentials at different times. And, of course, in schools beginning "small", with close and exacting definitions, each expansion in the adapted working conception of giftedness will call for additional screening of larger numbers of children than are expected ultimately to prove needful of the planned curricular processes.

5. *Distinguishable Curricular Experiences.* The demands which govern or delimit all studies and instruction intended to pertain with relative uniqueness to groups of gifted youth have been stated in the above discussion of particularized objectives. Units of the curriculum of the school, instructional patterns such as seminars or independent research projects, and materials devised for system-wide use—all these must involve those higher powers of mind which bring bright and talented children to attention in the first place, and must be of such nature that they promote the child's natural capacities for judgment, critical analysis, and creative reconstruction of things as they now exist. Unless a school can point to such clearly identifiable provisions, and indicate how these provisions implement and validate the process goals or particularized objectives also on record, it is quite likely that nothing predominantly pertinent to the gifted exists, and that, rather, old merchandise has simply and unfairly been given new tags.

Curricular modifications which are adequate (and more hopefully

excellent) for this task are perhaps among the most difficult matters the school staff has ever dealt with. Certain principles to guide these efforts are suggested in Section Five of this *Manual*. Equally mandatory are cautions that in the gradual development of increasingly pertinent processes, no *abusive* practices be allowed to creep in. Bright youngsters are being unwittingly subjected in today's heightened pressures to requirements and expectations some of which unquestionably serve to defeat their intended purpose, rather than to support it. And they are being allowed special courses and related experiences under conditions which connote *punishment* rather than *deserved privileges*. The direct and explicit purposefulness of all extraordinary requirements; the pursuit of unusual courses within the normal school day and week; and the evaluation of work by standards initially acknowledging the student's superior rank—all these must be designed and organically arranged so as to comprise in their totality a constructive and developmental array of experiences, as normal for these deviant youngsters as is the usual school regimen for his fellows in the main stream of organized education. Practices are likely to be inherently wrong if they lead to avoidance on the part of able youngsters and their parents, and if they require work in amount or kind which is not positively attractive in immediate nature and purposeful in ultimate objective.

6. *Flexible Pupil Deployment*. As with curriculum, where simple refinements and moderate rearrangements will not do, so it is with the inevitable placement of bright and talented pupils in instructional groups. Marked departures from traditional practices in administrative arrangements are necessary parallels to sound and forward-looking curricular adaptations. When conceived fundamentally, as the problem should be, a great variety of grouping patterns are feasible for youngsters as they pursue their course through the full range of knowledge provided, the activities conducing toward essential skills, and their progressive attainment of maturity in judgment and power of thought. Indeed, so diverse are the possibilities for variation in day-to-day shifting from group to group, short term reformulation of groups for the attainment of goals close at hand, separation of small numbers for fullest development of excellence in rare talents, and for flexible admission to the grades and movement through the graded structure, that *the only pattern clearly outmoded is the completely heterogeneous grouping of children, in relatively permanent and largely self-contained classes, which proceed by lock-step in a grade-a-year plan* as though this rusty pattern were a condition of nature inflicted upon the school and its pupil clientele. So great is the distance between schools that lead and those that lag in respect to imaginative administrative practices that known instances exist in which bright children in communities an hour's drive apart endure or enjoy radically different kinds of developmental experience. And so

frequent and widespread are schools who have made commendable departures, that the administrator or board member who "does not believe in newer methods" may see within this distance and with his own eyes real and effective differentiated patterns of pupil deployment such as he doesn't believe to exist.

7. *Comprehensiveness and Continuity*. Even in the face of the connotation which the term carries of a *variety* of provisions, numerous "programs" of education for the gifted are comprised of *single* features. Thus early admission to first grade may be practiced in one school system, and aptitude grouping in another, but not both in the same institution. Frequently, too, given provisions worthy of across the board application, are in fact utilized only at selective grade levels, or in selective schools within a system.

Instructional practices and administrative adaptations that are reasoned carefully in terms of reliable knowledge of human abilities and the educative process deserve to be brought to bear upon *every* differentially qualified child in a community, at *every* grade level in his entire school career, in *every* area of academic studies that involve those extremes in learning potential displayed by the identified gifted youngsters. Piecemeal and fragmentary allowances, selectively applied, while probably advantageous in and of themselves, fail in the in-between to provide what is equally necessary by way of properly gauged developmental learnings. Every phase of a total program of differential education for the gifted—identification, guidance, instruction, evaluation—should, therefore apply *comprehensively* across the pupil population and through the subject areas, and continuously (allowing variations on types of processes) through the maturing years of the selected children and the graded structure of the school from the kindergarten through general college.

8. *Progressive Program Development*. The various kinds of special provisions for bright and talented youngsters are not irresponsible devices in the nature of fads and passing fancy. Both careful reasoning and substantial experience lie behind successful practices. In the face of the intricate and highly significant task of developing within the local schools of any given community a full-scale pattern of differentiated educational provisions, it is likely that no school staff can rest satisfied with their present state of program development. A further earmark of excellence in a given program, therefore, is likely to be internal provisions for periodic re-examination of parts and of the whole structure erected to accomplish this function, and for refinement of effort where weaknesses are indicated.

9. *Financial Allocation*. No absolute sums can be indicated as essential to the attainment and maintenance of qualitative differential education for gifted youth. Nor is it necessary that every school system allocate similar amounts for each function within the program. On the other hand, it is simply not realistic to expect that

educational provisions which in their nature must be unusual ones, frequently involving extraordinary materials and facilities, can be accomplished within the same framework of allocations that pertained prior to the particular efforts. The usual school budget is characterized by all sorts of differing allocations. The nature of this selective spending reveals the values of the school system and its supporting community. Several activities which favor certain children over others are already heavily financed, and this practice is sanctioned by the community. The belated realization is that it is mandatory to provide differentially for youth of substantially deviant intellectual potential, and this at extraordinary cost proportionate to the economic strength of the system, in order to give these youngsters their fair share of educational opportunity.

In implementation, it is reasonable that any school system, no matter how well endowed, start with immediately clear and apparent outlets for increased funds, and progressively provide dissimilar allocations as the whole range of objectives of the program become more fully materialized. Schools with limited capital must judge where limited funds will do most good. What can no longer be excused is main failure to make selective allocations as demanded by the particular needs and capacities of these groups of deviant youngsters.

10. *Radiation of Excellence.* It is frequently remarked, and validly, that the studied attainment of a sound pattern of education commensurate with the heavily deviant abilities of brighter youth, will in the process lead to general improvements in the whole school program. What is equally true, but not so frequently remarked, is that one is not likely to find a good program for the gifted in other than generally good schools. Enlightened citizens or zealous professional members of the school staff are on sound grounds in pressing this cause to the point where tangible features of the total school program in their community can be identified which pertain with relative uniqueness to the higher degrees of human abilities represented in the concept of giftedness.