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NEWSLETTER
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It was twenty years ago this fall when I first encountered Virgil S. Ward in a course he was teaching at the University of Virginia. Prior to this time, Ward had triumphantly completed a classic study of gifted education for the Southern Regional Educational Board (1961), and his famous treatise, Educating the Gifted: An Axiomatic Approach (1961), was being used to design programs for these students and to train graduate students. While listening to Ward discuss the problems of understanding human abilities and aptitudes, I was impressed with several of his characteristics: here was a real professor -- in the European intellectual tradition -- who was interested in the great unanswered questions of education and philosophy; he emulated the Socratic method of solving problems; and his approach to all educational problems was to examine the underlying ethical and intellectual issues.

Ward's critique of Gifted Education in this issue reflects what I saw in him during our first class-meeting in 1967. My judgment regarding his thinking was correct then and it is correct today. Here was a lifelong seeker of Socratic dialogue with his students and colleagues, and his primary criterion for solving educational problems was based upon ethical and intellectual considerations. Ward has used these approaches to study the gifted for 35 years. As one of his former doctoral students and now a colleague, I believe that his analysis of the current state-of-the-art of gifted education should be given thoughtful consideration by all individuals who want to improve this field. As Ward has stressed with all of his students, the solutions to these problems will come only after asking the proper questions.

Ward's other major accomplishments in gifted education are: (1) Developed a professional training program in Differential Education for the Gifted at the University of Virginia (1957-77). This program emphasized the importance of theory and research in designing programs for the gifted; (2) Wrote papers for The Academically Talented Project of the National Education Association (1958-63). This project, chaired by James B. Conant and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, produced an increased awareness of the needs of the gifted -- shortly after the Russians launched Sputnik; and (3) Designed the curriculum model for The Governor's School of North Carolina (1963-65; 1977).

The second essay in this issue is a review by Michael Walters of The Closing of the American Mind. The author, Allan Bloom, has received considerable national attention because of his criticism of college students' low level of intellectual preparation for pursuits of the mind. This book and the one previously reviewed by Walters, Cultural Literacy by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., describe the educational, philosophical and cultural context for understanding Ward's analysis of gifted education. Our intention in publishing these reviews is to encourage educators of the gifted to take a broad view of educational problems from the perspective of history, philosophy, politics, literature and cultural criticism. As his friend and colleague for 34 years, I am pleased that Michael Walters uses this type of perspective in his reviews.

Maurice D. Fisher, Publisher

PUBLISHER OF BOOKS ON DIFFERENTIAL EDUCATION FOR THE GIFTED

**DIFFERENTIAL EDUCATION FOR THE GIFTED 1987: A
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS AND CALL TO ARMS**
VIRGIL S. WARD, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION
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Differential Education for the Gifted is now approaching one hundred years and is looking forward to the the next century for the attainment of a mature and viable educational program. Notable changes in the field have occurred across these decades, and it is the purpose of this brief review, invited by the publisher of the Gifted Education Newsletter, to highlight certain contrasts in understanding, viewpoint and practice which have evolved. Now the reader may judge the seriousness of the ideological problems and conceptual disparities which presently divide the field. Through the re-examination of assumptions and understandings they now hold, each individual should take appropriate action to improve this field.

The early work in Differential Education for the Gifted which emphasized a search for a theoretical basis, professional training and experimental projects were conducted by such figures as Alfred Binet, Lewis M. Terman, H. H. Goddard and Leta S. Hollingworth. Popular, political and professional interest thereafter came in peaks and valleys. Various issues and problems arose as one decade blended into another -- to wit: the post-war need for replenishing the ranks of national leadership lost in the military struggle; the Sputnik era which stimulated interest in mathematics and the sciences; and these periods were followed by frustrating cycles of latency and indifference. Even during this latter period, such progress as was made came largely through the efforts of educational organizations such as the National Education Association and the Council for Exceptional Children. Also, there were important contributions made from the business and corporate sectors, among these Carnegie, Ford and Rockefeller were the more prominent.

At the beginning of the 1970s, there were positive and negative developments in the field of gifted education. In 1971 the U.S. Commissioner of Education, Sidney P. Marland, issued a famous report which emphasized policy advocacy and financial support for gifted education on a national scale. At the same time, this federal support regrettably interjected guidelines which resulted in harmful dynamics for the gifted education scene. Among these harmful effects were the development and control of programs for the gifted based upon "dollar power," political intervention, and misguided personal ambition. These dynamics swiftly played havoc with the essentially scholarly understanding of the needs of the gifted and their potential which had prevailed in the past. And it is the lingering effects of these conditions that weaken and endanger the education of gifted youth.

This paper concludes with a resolution which is based on summarizing the viewpoints represented herein, and with an invitation for action to all. This

call to professional arms will require self-reflection and the re-examination of assumptions, and should develop a sense of urgency toward the restoration of intellectual integrity and theoretical authenticity to the presently divided and confused field of Differential Education for the Gifted.

A Prototype of Differential Education for the Gifted

The following set of assumptions were previously developed by this writer and originally published in a report by the Southern Regional Education Board (1962) under a grant from the Carnegie Corporation. This prototype and important corresponding materials can be found in -- Gifted Education: Exploratory Studies of Theories and Practice (Manassas, VA: Gifted Education Press, 1983). These assumptions are:

(a) Gifted children as a group have different learning characteristics. For example, they learn faster and retain more, and they tend to think more deeply about what they learn.

(b) As adults, gifted persons tend to assume distinctive social roles as leaders in the development and advancement of whatever work they engage in.

(c) The regular school curriculum only barely approximates the demands of either the greater learning capacity or the anticipated social roles of gifted persons.

(d) It is possible to devise an educational program which meets their unique needs.

(e) So that society, as well as the persons themselves, may enjoy longer the fruits of their productive and creative labors, it is important that Differential Education discovers more gifted persons and improves their education.

This set of assumptions served as a prototype from the 1930s to the Second World War and immediately thereafter, and was a stable and productive basis for continuing research and understanding. And though this prototype is now regrettably maligned (see next Section) through an indiscriminate accumulation of "models" and "systems," few of these constitute a satisfactory theory of education for the gifted. It is still the original prototype (described in the five points above) which sustains and is exemplified within those outstanding programs for the gifted.

The Antithetical Situation Today

Scholarly insight and concern proved quickly to be no match for political interest, dollar power and expedient personal charisma. This state-of-affairs is as follows:

1. The Myth of So-Called Democratic Selection and Education Procedures -- this political motif has been expressed with "head counts" and "pins-in-maps" producing the heedless and unwarranted spread of educational provisions (however nominal) among inflated and loosely targeted groups.

2. Misunderstanding the Concept of Giftedness -- Definitions have been rewritten to accommodate bureaucratic concerns. The resulting typologies may not accurately reflect scientifically derived concepts of giftedness.

3. Distortion of Conventional Meanings, Definitions and Principles -- Sloppy language and literature have blurred distinctions between "nature" and "nurture"; the ubiquitous use of "ability" for the more sharply discriminating "capability" (potential); the substitution of talent for aptitude; and in general, the terms intelligence, effort, interest, and learning.

In a way similar to these linguistic misuses, are the fetish-like obsessions with single concepts such as "creativity" and "divergent thinking" to the preclusion of more powerful qualities of mind and personality. Many enrichment curricula preclude powerful terms such as judgment, logical inference, deepened insight, and other complex cognitive processes. Additionally, there is too much confusion with the term "creative thinking." Regardless of the evasiveness and impreciseness of "enrichment" and "creativity" when adapted to gifted programs, they have become the "game" in GCT education, as though there were none other.

4. Disingenuous Logic and Calculated Mass Appeal -- As indicated by the erroneous use of otherwise legitimate concepts and processes, for example: brainstorming as distinct from reasoning; personal conviction as distinct from evidenced observation; and the clever use of language calculated to obscure weak reasoning and to fend off valid criticisms.

5. Abusive Practices in Professional Development -- Involving fast and unselective "proselytization" of teachers, fast and superficial training of these loosely recruited advocates through mini-courses, week-end conferences, and short-term training sessions that produce a cheapened concept of disciplined professional education.

The five remaining items in this disconcerting list are even more serious than those just described. Thus --

6. Creation of an Irresponsible Educational Counter-Culture -- No longer is there a prevailing general understanding of gifted education, with responsible variations on this understanding, and constructive adaptations to specific educational settings. Unfortunately, most of the current differences are irreconcilable, and therefore divisive and dissipative.

7. Production and Dissemination of Superfluous Knowledge -- The processes of "knowledge production and utilization," as understood by psychologists and sociologists, link a developing science with social progress. In the case of Differential Education for the Gifted, this field should lead to the extraordinary development of extraordinary persons who make important intellectual contributions to society.

Educational inquiry has become self- and system-serving rather than open and objective investigation. And similarly, projects and programs are now devised, not to test a theory of educating the gifted, but rather to promulgate a restricted "package" consisting of a model, materials kit or plan.

8. Practicing Denial of Theory -- Theory, indispensable for guiding the practice of Differential Education for the Gifted **has become desecrated and denied**. The testing of such a theory through rigorous project and program evaluations is almost non-existent.

Disparity, Confusion and Denouement

It appears eminently true, moreover, that in education as well as in economics, "bad money drives out good." However devastating these misunderstandings and malefactions against the basic logic of Differential Education for the Gifted, there are still further depredations. Two more are set forth here by way of a deliberately provocative, but defensible, conclusion to the present study of a once promising educational field now in serious decline.

The first of these conditions (Observation 9) is the reasoned position that the American school of today is failing to serve the educational welfare of gifted youth as well as was done three or four decades ago. The second observation (No. 10, and final) suggests that by virtue of the deteriorated conditions noted, the field itself is today more vulnerable on theoretic and pragmatic grounds than ever before to hostile, but competent, ideological attacks.

9. The diminished probability of authentically differentiated education for the gifted individual -- i.e.:

Theories of differential education based upon the prototype already described tended to be better understood, and educational practice was more cohesively centered upon this theory. Instructional personnel tended to be more highly selected and better trained. Where there was external financial support for programs, it tended to be awarded only after careful scrutiny of project leaders and the institutional setting.

10: The Enhanced Vulnerability of the Cause and Field to Hostile Ideological Attack -- i.e.:

The field of Differential Education for the Gifted is today, more than ever before, vulnerable to counteractive attitudes and biases ranging from simple disbelief to active and aggressive ideological disavowal among competent scholars. (for example, see -- Bull, Barry L. Eminence and precocity: An examination of the justification of education for the gifted and talented. Teachers College Record, 1985, 87, 1-19.)

These discordant views, scarcely recognized and essentially unopposed by the active leadership in the gifted education field today, have potentially disastrous consequences for local school districts (particularly their budgets for gifted programs), and for national and state policy, and financial support from the public or private sectors. The notion, then, of possible extinction or severe reduction of gifted programs can be viewed as the ultimate travesty.

A CALL TO PROFESSIONAL ACTION FOR THE RESTORATION
 OF INTEGRITY TO A DETERIORATED FIELD

Now the functional purpose of this regrettable catalog of unhappy observations upon Differential Education for the Gifted is to: provoke, on the part of serious readers of this ambitious Newsletter, further thought and action as to the character of this field, and their respective roles within it. The following resolution is respectfully submitted.

RESOLUTION

Whereas, in an informed and reasoned analysis of the contemporary state-of-affairs of Differential Education for the Gifted (now approaching the end of its first century as an organized area in American science and education) evidence and observation indicate that the:

(a) Basic conception deriving from the bold scientific inquiry and educational imagination of the pioneer figures of the movement has in current practice been invaded, disparaged and effectively displaced by a loose conglomeration of ill-founded and limited theories (plans, systems and models) which in significant ways are contradictory;

(b) Previously cohesive literature, developed around this serviceable prototype, has been substantially displaced (with only occasional exceptions) by conference papers, books, procedural guidelines, and instructional kits. In regard to such narrow concepts, serious students of the gifted must now go begging for solidly intellectual thought and writing. Professionals with a sense

of intellectual integrity need and are capable of this high level of thought and writing, and the science of differential education deserves and requires it.;

(c) Resulting consequences of this serious loss of conceptual integrity, stability and direction have included a failure to advance the quality of differentiated educational experiences for gifted students. As an ultimate tragedy and travesty, the field is vulnerable to hostile ideological attacks and potential extinction.

Therefore, be it resolved that:

(d) To restore the integrity of Differential Education for the Gifted, each concerned and active individual in a position of educational responsibility should examine or re-examine the nature, consistency and justifiability of his or her understanding, beliefs and commitments, for the following purpose --

(e) Given concurrence with the regrettable analysis presented here, each individual should act within his or her own realm of responsibility (classroom instruction, project or program director, university professor, administrator, or agency representative within the private or public sector) and convictions to restore the integrity of this inordinately important field of education. This work should bring it into line once again with the historic and intellectual legacy (understanding, vision, achievement) held in common among its pioneers, so that gifted students can once again be directed toward personal fulfillment, and through their lifetime of labors, improve the welfare of all.>>

BOOK REVIEW

The Closing of the American Mind by Allan Bloom. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

Here you do not attain knowledge by remaining on the shore and watching the foaming waves, you must make the venture and cast yourself in, you must swim, alert, and with all of your force.

Martin Buber

Although the topic of concern is of national interest, it is remarkable that this book should achieve a best seller status. The condition of American education is constantly and intensively changing, but this problem is usually restricted to experts and those personally involved on a professional level with the field of education. That this subject has become so high on the nonfiction best seller list is an important accomplishment for public education. It is indeed an achievement for Allan Bloom to have written a book that has been able to capture the attention of the American public.

The book is divided into three main sections: Students, Nihilism, American Style, and The University. This reviewer believes that it is the commentary in the first part on the attitudes of contemporary American college students that has touched both a raw nerve and the heart of the American public. The attitudes of Bloom's students about literature and culture are what greatly disturbs him: "At all events, whatever the cause, our students have lost the practice of and the taste for reading. They have not learned how to read, nor do they have the expectation of delight or improvement from reading....I began to ask my large introductory classes, and any other group of younger students to which I spoke, what books really count for them. Most are silent, puzzled by the question." Keep in mind that the group referred to in this book includes some of the most gifted students in the nation -- those from such universities as Chicago, Cornell and Yale.

Bloom goes on to describe the social ingredients for this anti-cultural literacy mentality. These include the impact of divorce, rock music, the need for immediate gratification, narcissistic personalities, and the inability to forge emotional relationships based upon commitment. This section is relevant for the gifted because many of them fit this description of being intellectually bright, but turned-off to the culture of literacy.

Bloom dislikes an approach to studying society that he calls historicism. This is the analysis of a subject or event based upon the historical factors related to a specific time and place. Unfortunately, Bloom turns to the opposite viewpoint, ahistoricism -- an intellectual analysis based primarily on ideas with very little reference to actual historical events. Most serious readers can readily agree that the different social problems which Bloom describes are the causes of aliteracy. (By aliteracy, I mean that students can read and understand certain information, but they are unable to relate it on an affective level to their personal lives.) But his refusal to deal with social problems in both political and historical contexts is annoying to this reviewer, e.g., Bloom does not discuss how the impacts of the Vietnam War, the corruption of public officials and the AIDS epidemic have caused the present social malaise. He confuses simple descriptions of the symptoms with a correct diagnosis of the disease.

In the second section -- Nihilism, American Style -- Bloom attempts to get at the intellectual roots of relativism (the refusal to believe in absolute or criterion values) and nihilism (the belief that there is no objective reality, rather it is a matter of one's personal perceptions). He blames what he calls the "German Connection" for the prevalence of relativism and nihilism in American society. According to Bloom, there is a chain of thought that links "German Philosophy" from Nietzsche to Heidegger with the present cultural problems of American society. In fact, he puts any intellectual who was born in Germany into this accusatory chain. Their personal, philosophical or religious views are not important to this author; only their being a "German" is significant. This

position is not only reductionistic, but a crude form of ethnic stereotyping. A prime example of Bloom's lack of intellectual integrity in this matter occurs in his treatment of the child psychologist, Bruno Bettelheim, who was born and educated in Germany. Bloom says, "One of the the links between Germany and the United States, the psychologist, Bruno Bettelheim, actually plays a cameo role in Zelig." (a Woody Allen film) The fact that Bettelheim was an early victim of Nazi persecution, and fled to the United States in 1939 demonstrates that he was not part of a unified "German Philosophy." But the most horrendous aspect of this example is that Bettelheim was one of the few academics who spoke up publically about the excesses of the 1960s student movement while it was actually occurring. In the April 7, 1969 issue of U.S. News & World Report, there is a three page account of Bettelheim's testimony before the House Special Subcommittee on Education on March 20, 1969. This testimony was presented over eighteen years ago but it includes a more valid critique of the American college than Bloom has presented in his book. It is also noteworthy that Bettelheim was a professor at the University of Chicago, the present university where Bloom teaches, when he gave this testimony. It is difficult to believe that Bloom was not aware of Bettelheim's views, especially since Bettelheim was so maligned by the political Left. Additionally, Saul Bellow, who wrote the Introduction to Bloom's book, is a long-time colleague of Bettelheim. Other important intellectuals who are also maligned by Bloom in the second section of his book are Erich Fromm (neo-Freudian psychoanalyst and writer) and Theodore Adorno (social psychologist who developed the term, "authoritarian personality").

The last section, The University, includes Bloom's perception of the role of the university in American life. He conceives the university as being a sanctuary for the Socratic temperament. This reviewer finds Bloom's idea of this role to be an illusion. From my personal experience, the contemporary American university would find a true Socratic thinker to be a "disturber of the peace." Bloom is entitled to his concept of the American university; however, he has not given the reader sufficient evidence to support his viewpoint.

Bloom's book should be compared with the essay by Virgil Ward that is in this Newsletter. Both of these academics have similar concerns and responses to contemporary American education. The difference is that Ward possesses intellectual integrity that is of a vigorous nature. He realizes that the problems of this nation unfold in an historical framework and that the real connection between ideas and events is the Human Connection. Like Bloom, Ward also believes that there has been a failure of nerve among the educational leadership of this nation, that there is a need to recover lost territory, and that we must return to honesty and self-responsibility in American society and education. But Ward echoes that wonderful statement of Walt Kelly's Pogo, "We have met the enemy and it is ourselves.">> Michael E. Walters, New York City Public Schools

Life lived in freedom is personal responsibility or it is a pathetic force.

Martin Buber

LETTERS RECEIVED

From E. D. Hirsch, Jr. — Regarding M. Walters' criticism of Hirsch's interpretation of John Dewey's pedagogy:

I think that Walters is right, and I also think that my criticism of Dewey is justified. This apparent discrepancy can be resolved by noticing that Dewey wrote about education over three decades at least, and that he made statements that are compatible with different points of view. I am very glad to take Dewey as my master. I respect him tremendously. But I think that you and Michael Walters would both agree that Dewey has also been the master of those who brought us the modern, relevant, skills curriculum.

From Joan Walsh of TIME Magazine's Editorial Offices — Regarding M. D. Fisher's comments on an article in TIME about Hirsch and Bloom:

Thank you for your letter prompted by TIME's Education report "Are Student Heads Full of Emptiness?" We took interested note of the Gifted Education Press Newsletter and particularly of Michael Walters' appraisal of E. D. Hirsch's Cultural Literacy.

Again, thank you for writing. The editors send their regards and best wishes.

We would like to thank the following individuals for their kind remarks about Walters' review of Hirsch's book and for their comments on this Newsletter:

Joseph Epstein, Editor, The American Scholar; Dorothy Rich, President, The Home and School Institute of Washington, D.C.; Bella Kranz of New York, developer of the Kranz Talent Identification Instrument; Anita Schneider, Division of General Academic Education, New Jersey State Department of Education; and Keith D. Steck, Gifted Program Consultant, Utah State Department of Education.

Also, we appreciate requests for copies of our Newsletter. Here is a cross section of inquiries:

Diane Janke, Extended Learning Program, Newton, Kansas; Kaye Muennink, Randolph Elementary School, Universal City, Texas; Joan Sinclair, Hopewell, New Jersey; Barbara Prichard, Fayetteville, Arkansas Public Schools; Leslie J. Gordon, President, Association for Bright Children, Winnipeg, Manitoba-Canada; Linda M. Bobich, Curriculum Inservice Specialist, Allegheny Intermediate Unit, Pittsburgh; Beatrice J. Heller, Department Head, Gifted & Talented, Lancaster, Pennsylvania School District; Nancy Lukenbill, Gifted-Talented Specialist, Montana State Department of Instruction; Dr. Paula Hauser, Leawood, Kansas; Mrs. Sidney Moon, Coordinator of Gifted Education, Tippecanoe School Corporation, Lafayette, Indiana; Sterling C. Argyle, Principal, Larsen Elementary School, Spanish Fork, Utah; Sally Walker, Coordinator of Gifted, Boone-Winnebago Counties School District, Rockford, Illinois; Dr. David P. Hermanson, Administrator-Gifted and Talented Education, San Diego City Schools; Pamela Jensen, Coordinator, Gifted Education, Denver Public Schools; and Barabara Ann Howell of Logan Utah.>>