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Yossel Naiman was a Coordinator of Programs for the Gifted in the Chicago Public Schools for nineteen years before retiring in 1986. In this position, he helped to establish one of the most academically rigorous differentiated programs in the nation. With the supervision and advice of Richard Ronvik, his mentor and the Director of Programs for the Gifted (Chicago Board of Education), Mr. Naiman started the first comprehensive and articulated K through 8 gifted program in this school district. This program offered instruction in eleven different subject areas, including Latin and Greek and the study of science in kindergarten. Beginning in the first grade, he used a departmental setup in such areas as science, literature and music. In addition, the teachers had to teach both the form and content of each subject, beginning with Aesop's fables in the primary grades.

We are happy to present Naiman's ideas on the definition of giftedness and the types of educational programs which should be developed for these students. His position on these matters represents the type of thinking which led to one of the strongest urban-based programs for the gifted in the Midwest and across the United States. He is also concerned with superficial and destructive influences frequently associated with "creativity" training and "models" of teaching the gifted. Although the interview with Yossel Naiman occurred in 1982, his words are even more relevant today than they were in the early 1980's because of the proliferation of these superficial ideas, methods, and movements during the last ten years. Naiman lives in Evanston, Illinois where he is currently reflecting upon and writing about the enormous problems of this crucial field of education. We thank him for permission to publish this radio interview, and we thank Professor Virgil Ward of the University of Virginia for producing the transcript and releasing it to Gifted Education Press.

From another great state in the Midwest (Kansas), we present an article on mentoring the gifted by Maureen Waters, editor and publisher of Mentor. This newsletter is published quarterly, and supports and encourages the art of mentoring. We found Ms. Waters' article to be of interest and importance because it describes how two school districts in Kansas operate their mentoring programs for gifted students. The procedures followed and the principles of mentoring identified by Waters can be adopted by many gifted programs. If you would like to learn more about her newsletter, write to: Mentor, P.O. Box 4382, Overland Park, Kansas 66204.

We have always believed that theatre and drama are among the best vehicles for encouraging gifted students to think about the direction of their lives and their role in society. The article by Michael Walters offers strong support for this position by showing how the plays of Bertolt Brecht and George Bernard Shaw can help the gifted to critically examine the conflicts between individual ideas and political realities. This is the way to learn to think -- dwelling upon the great ideas expressed in stimulating plays and other outstanding literature!

Maurice D. Fisher, Publisher

THE NATURE OF GIFTEDNESS: INTERVIEW WITH YOSSEL NAIMAN, FORMERLY
COORDINATOR OF GIFTED PROGRAMS, CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1967-86

This interview was conducted in May 1982 by Elaine Kahonik and David Osborne over Chicago radio station CRIS, a subsidiary of WBEZ-FM which is an educational public radio station affiliated with the Chicago Board of Education. The name of the program was "Listener Line." Preceding this discussion, Kahonik read "The Gifted Can't Weigh That Giraffe" (The New York Times: Fall Survey of Education, Nov. 15, 1981 [Sec.12], p. 67) by Dr. Selma Wassermann of Simon Frazer University, Burnaby, British Columbia in Canada. In this article, she stated that the gifted children she observed were less creative, more rigid in their thinking, more dependent, and less tolerant of ambiguity than average or below average children, and they had more constant and pervasive anxiety about learning than their less gifted peers. Their orientation to learning and problem-solving was to give "single correct answers" on lower-order learning tasks. The specific example which Wassermann gave to demonstrate this last point was that the gifted children she questioned could not provide creative solutions to how to "weigh a giraffe." Although there were two interviewers, we have combined their questions into a single INTERVIEWER category for the sake of simplicity.

INTERVIEWER: I assume you disagree with Dr. Wassermann's conclusions regarding gifted children.

YOSSEL NAIMAN: The observations she has made are generalizations that follow a theoretical base which is not true in practice. If something is not true in practice, it is not true in theory. If Dr. Wassermann takes a group of children that are low achievers and gives me a group of gifted children, I submit to you that my group will beat her group every time on tasks of a significant intellectual nature.

INTERVIEWER: What is a gifted child? How does one recognize a gifted child?

NAIMAN: Well, I would start out with the observation that the term "gifted" can be used in a variety of ways. There are non-technical ways in which you can use this word. For example, you could say a person who has a skill that is of value is gifted in that particular area. But if you are talking about anything broader or in a technological education sense, then you are not talking about economic advantage, pulchritude or even athletic talent.

What you are talking about is something that will move the human condition forward in a positive manner. It is of the mind and it is not anything else. I would concede one point to what Dr. Wassermann said, and that is: If one does not consider a variety of alternatives in solving problems, one's chances of finding a good solution are smaller.

This viewpoint is not new with her; she is apparently reflecting Dr. Paul Torrance's position on creative problem-solving. But there is a preceding point-of-view by Louis Pasteur who said, "Chance favors the trained mind." Now, the truth lies somewhere between these two positions. However, I regard the first position as representing a general over-statement unsupported by psychological theory. What Dr. Wassermann refers to here is divergent thinking which is not synonymous with giftedness.

In my observation, there's no such thing as gifted children. There are intelligent children who come into confluence with profound experiences, and there are intelligent children who do not have these experiences. Those who have profound experiences will have a better chance of making important contributions to the sciences, the humanities and the world of practical affairs. Therefore, I would say that the Pasteurian point-of-view has been singularly more productive.

I have another problem with Dr. Wasserman's article. Her notion of what creativity is suggests that it is something other than an intellectual function. If a giraffe (since she chooses to use a giraffe in her example) traipses around on the floor and creates a visually pleasing image with its hoofs, that is not a conscious act. Rather, it is an unconscious act with no prior design. I submit that if creativity were operating here, there would be an element of prior design. There are people who do prodigious things of a creative nature but will never attribute it to prior experiences or education. They would suggest that it was something akin to "falling off a donkey on the way to Damascus," like Saint Paul. But, in fact, the combination of their precedent experiences and what nature has given them (neither of which they usually have any responsibility for) is what produces the effect in question.

In Colonial America, the world was changed when intelligent people came into confluence with profound experiences. For example, let's assume that Thomas Jefferson was the son of an indentured servant rather than that of a wealthy planter. Would we have the Declaration of Independence or the Virginia Statute for religious freedom? I doubt it. The advancement of the human condition is based upon a whole trail of history in which there is a cumulative effect; therefore, one cannot be gifted in the abstract sense. Rather giftedness is at the cutting edge of an advanced civilization, and it is not merely a matter of developing a skill which is believed to produce excellence.

INTERVIEWER: Can we then create gifted children?

NAIMAN: I'm not absolutely certain about that. However, I would say this: We can take intelligent children, and we can subject them to experiences that are not trivial (such as weighing a giraffe, which is on the scale of things, relatively unimportant). We can give them the educational disciplines that have been generated in the past. We can place them into communion with the fountainhead thinkers of the past, so

they don't have to "reinvent the wheel." And we can use this educational approach as a basis for the type of fountainhead thinking they can do. Ultimately, giftedness is the ability to envision complex, holistic realities which are beyond the vision of one's contemporaries, and to use those realities as a basis for constructing paradigms and concepts which illuminate and improve the human condition. Despite many people's thinking, I do not know individuals of low intelligence who are able to do that or who have ever done that. I have not, in my twenty years of experience in this field, encountered such individuals although there are academicians tripping on the way over their humanitarian value judgments who speak of such things. They have no evidence to support that point-of-view, at least none to my satisfaction.

INTERVIEWER: So, can intelligence be said to be high or low in a civilization or in a group of people?

NAIMAN: Intelligence is a natural endowment. Giftedness is an acquired characteristic. If you have a Mozart whose father is not a musician and who never comes into contact with a musical environment, then you do not get Mozart's musical work. Also, there are people who confuse what I would call giftedness with what I would call talent. We have in this city of Chicago many people who are talented. There are, for example, commercial artists in advertising agencies who are excellent at drawing herringbone. They are able to replicate herringbone with a degree of excellence that no one else is able to replicate. But there is a distinction between what it is they do with excellence and that which involves the application of the intellect. We value Bill Mauldin, not because of his ability to draw; there are other cartoonists who can draw much better than Bill Mauldin. There were people in the time of Rembrandt who were better graphic artists than Rembrandt. There were also individuals who could hear different pitches a lot better than Beethoven. But we value Beethoven, Rembrandt and Mauldin, not because of these skills, but because of their intellectual accomplishments and the creation of something new. People of average or low intelligence do not do that. They may be excellent at replicative functions, but very poor at meaningful creative functions.

INTERVIEWER: You seem to be saying any number of things, chiefly among them that intelligence is possibly hereditary and naturally higher in some people than others. Secondly, that no matter how intelligent you are, you will not become gifted if you are not exposed to the proper educational environment. For instance, if a man like Thomas Jefferson (or Beethoven or Mozart for that matter) was not exposed to various stimulating educational experiences, he would have never become a great intellect. Others would argue that Jefferson would have been just as great if he had a woodcarver for a father. How would you respond?

NAIMAN: Children who do not experience a great deal of interaction with stimulating adults are generally of lower intelligence than those who

have a large degree of such interaction from infancy. I have short legs and a long torso. I may improve my ability to run, but I'm never going to be a world class runner like Kip Keino because he has inherited long legs and a short torso. Nature is not fair or equitable and we are all products of chance. If we have more brains or more brawn or more height or less, these are not things that we should be necessarily proud of or not proud of. Instead, we should ask this question as it relates to gifted education: Is it true that there are some people who can attain a higher level of educability than others, and are there some people who are more susceptible to a higher level of contemplation, reflection, and invention than others? There are indeed such children and adults, so the key question is: Do we exploit this condition to society's advantage or do we ignore it to our folly? There is ample evidence to show that with certain types of treatment, children can be exploited a great deal more than otherwise. For example, take the Quiz Kids radio show in the 1940's and 1950's.

I have the advantage to have been an older child in the same school when Joel Kupperman, one of the Quiz Kids, was there. One of my boyfriends, who was also a Quiz Kid, was his older cousin. Now, I submit that these were reasonably intelligent children. However, they differed from other children by virtue of the fact that their parents took a great deal of care in their education, not necessarily to the children's own immediate benefit or well-being. I recall, in 1938 or 1939, Joel Kupperman's older cousin Floyd saying to him, "Joel, what you do mathematically is not so phenomenal. There is a man at Harvard by the name of Norbert Wiener who has ideas that are going to create machines that will make what you do very, very insignificant." Now, the person who made this statement at that time was an eleven year old boy speaking to a six year old boy. I have not seen Floyd for many years, but I understand that he became one of the world's leading experts on the miniaturization of electronic components. That young boy (Floyd) had a father who was a martinet, a "West Point drill sergeant." For example, when he was working on a ham radio at ten years of age, his father (who was an electrical engineer) looked at him and said, "Floyd, that is not any way for you to hold a pair of pliers." In that immediate moment, Floyd was probably a little bit nervous and stressful. However, I'm glad he suffered that stress, you know, for so mundane a purpose as his later outstanding work in electronics and subsequent technical contributions to the national defense.

INTERVIEWER: What happened to Joel Kupperman?

NAIMAN: He rebelled and instead of following mathematics, he eventually became a professor of philosophy at the University of Connecticut. He does not want to hear about the Quiz Kids or the mention of gifted children. But that doesn't bother me terribly.

INTERVIEWER: What you're saying is that we have a responsibility to select intelligent children, and to make them gifted through education.

NAIMAN: At least to the degree that it is possible.

INTERVIEWER: Is there an objective way to identify gifted children?

NAIMAN: Total objectivity is an ideal. By definition, an ideal is something you never attain; you strive to achieve it. Although you cannot identify the gifted on the basis of total objectivity, this does not mean that gifted education is not effectively served by anything less than absolute objectivity.

INTERVIEWER: Then, what is the main purpose of gifted education?

NAIMAN: A lot of individuals promote gifted education on the grounds that it is favored by the parents of gifted children. If that were the main reason, then I would not do it. Or if the only reason for supporting programs for gifted children was to improve their standards of living in the future, I would be less enthusiastic about this field.

The reason for gifted education, the more profound, salient and socially useful reason, is not for the service of the gifted child or for his parents; it is for the service of society in general. In the same way, society benefited from the creation of public schools. In my judgment, it is socially useful in a more profound way to appropriately educate the gifted child because of its benefits to the total society than just to him alone, even though it does serve that purpose as well.

Consider the fact that the Bronx High School of Science was created in the New York City Public Schools so that children who were profoundly able in science were given a rigorous education. That gave rise to a gentleman named Jonas Salk who was a student at this high school. Now Salk's later development of a polio vaccine did not derive from circumstances in which educators tried to prevent him from experiencing stress; nor did it derive from his working on trivial problems such as "weighing a giraffe." It emerged from his studying very rigorous disciplines and responding to them in a very serious manner.

INTERVIEWER: Because Jonas Salk made such an important contribution to society, this in a sense justifies gifted education. But what happened to all of his classmates? Did they make important contributions to society? If not, was this program a failure?

NAIMAN: No, I don't think so. For the most part this type of program probably benefits most of those students who participate in it. If what I do results in producing only one Salk, then all of the investment of time and energy, all of the aggravation over those with pseudo-egalitarian ideas that I encounter, all of the begging at the state legislature, all of the administrivia that one has to put up with in order to implement an effective gifted program, is worthwhile.

INTERVIEWER: Can we talk now about the family of the gifted child? Do gifted children recur in the same families? For instance, was Thomas Jefferson's entire family brilliant or just him?

NAIMAN: Well, I don't know about his family but one thing is certain about the development of giftedness. It is that when gifted individuals live together in the same environment, they tend to be

more creatively productive as evidenced by certain periods of history and the confluence of important ideas. Without his exposure to the ideas of three of the most intellectually sophisticated men of his time -- notably Francis Fauquier, William Small and George Wythe -- there would have been no Thomas Jefferson, political genius. The American Revolution was led by a collection of monumental intellects who came together at a particular time with a confluence of mutually stimulating ideas.

INTERVIEWER: You're promoting the idea that natively intelligent children can be spurred to higher levels of accomplishment by experiencing the proper educational environment. Then why not have a gifted program for everyone?

NAIMAN: Because not everyone is susceptible to a gifted program. For example, a schoolmaster sees that a young student grasps a great deal more at a faster rate, and with more insight and greater depth than the other students in his class. The schoolmaster sends this student to a special seminary which produces a future Pope John XXIII. You do not make this student less humanitarian by providing him with the best possible education. You do not make him less able to relate to the common man. Instead, you make him more able to do this.

INTERVIEWER: Then what's the difference between a gifted program and a regular program?

NAIMAN: There are many programs called "gifted programs" which are suitable for every student. They should not even be called gifted programs, and not offered in that name. In contrast, there are other programs in which the children who are responsive to more profound levels of education, do indeed receive it -- that's an actual gifted program. If a child of less cognitive endowment is exposed to this latter type of program, you are not doing him any favors by placing him in a rigorous differentiated program.

Now, there are a good many "gifted programs" all over the country, all over the world that are not bona fide gifted programs. They are anti-egalitarian programs because what they offer is more of the same thing (e.g., classroom enrichment, pull-out resource program) to a particular student than they would typically offer to someone else who would be as equally responsive to it. That's anti-egalitarianism in my judgement and something I would not support.

If you have a genuine gifted program, you are giving children instruction which is faster in pace, broader in scope, and more profound in depth than can be entertained by those of ordinary capability. When William Small, Francis Fauquier and George Wythe took Thomas Jefferson aside, and gave him ten years of education, where they normally finished with the average student in three, they gave him communion with the ideas that were bequeathed unto them for a greater promise, and we are his beneficiaries.>> *****

MENTORING FOR THE GIFTED STUDENT
BY MAUREEN WATERS, PUBLISHER/EDITOR
MENTOR NEWSLETTER, OVERLAND, KANSAS

Why have a mentoring program which by its very nature is extra special and will only serve to make gifted students even more different? One reason is to provide a sense of community. The Blue Valley School District in southern Johnson County, Kansas has the right approach. "Our program is based on business partners," says Stephany Hughes, enrichment specialist. "Each school has its own partners that have an emotional commitment to Blue Valley Schools." This partnership is one aspect of the community the students become a part of when they enter the mentoring program. They can interact with their peers in this program, and they know they have the support of the school and their teachers. In addition, they realize the importance of the advocacy of the business community, which encourages gifted students to excel in their work while smoothing the way into adulthood.

At Blue Valley High School, the business partners are Yellow Freight and United Telecom. Hughes says these two companies provide almost every type of mentoring relationship except those in the medical area. For example, one young man completed a project on voice-messaging systems. He created a customer survey, compiled and analyzed the data, and presented a written proposal to United Telecom. A young woman interested in research and development spent her mentoring time at Yellow Freight. This company was having trouble with truck weights, so she did a study on axle weight and load distribution, followed by a statistical analysis and proposal that will save Yellow Freight thousands of dollars. The students in this program offer valuable contributions to the businesses which take the time to offer them mentorships, and they learn how important it is to be a part of an interested community.

But being part of a community also means developing knowledge of yourself and learning how to adapt to social and work environments. "Interpersonal intelligence...concerns knowledge of others, and the understanding of how other people's behavior reflects their feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and needs...Without these forms of knowledge, individuals have difficulty mastering their social roles and maturing emotionally." (Managing the Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted by Connie C. Schmitz and Judy Galbraith, Free Spirit Publishing Co., Minneapolis, 1985). Because gifted students are already super sensitive, "they need adult leaders to help them make choices, take chances, and accept themselves when they fall short of perfection." (Ibid.) They need models in the real world, and they need to see those models in action. Once again, the Blue Valley School District is providing an early view into the business community. In the lower grades, shadowing -- a form of mentoring -- is used. Here, students

choose an occupation or career they are interested in and they shadow, or follow, a person for a day to learn what that person's work is like.

Another reason for mentoring programs grows out of the realization that, "students don't learn by grades," says Joyce Scammahorn, Coordinator of Gifted Education at the Shawnee Mission School District in northern Johnson County, Kansas. Educators have been called on to look at education in more creative ways, such as sending a fifth grader to high school to take German.

"Through mentoring," Scammahorn explains, "we are able to look at the individual's actual needs." In the Shawnee Mission School District, students take a course in mentoring. Some have the opportunity to pursue interests in the medical field through a program with the University of Kansas Medical Center where they may spend the summer -- with pay. "Exciting things come out of this program. The University of Kansas feels this is profitable for them, and the students are treated like grad students," says Scammahorn.

SETTING UP A MENTORING PROGRAM

"The number of mentors, adults with an interest or skill they are willing to share with young people, is growing, particularly in large cities where people are actively seeking ways to meet others with similar interests," writes Priscilla L. Vail in Smart Kids with School Problems (E. P. Dutton, New York, 1987).

As Stephany Hughes of the Blue Valley School District has indicated, it is essential to find partners who are truly committed to the school/students, and are willing to take the time required to assure that students get the most out of the program. The mentor and student must each recognize their roles: (1) the student is an important person with an interest in a particular field or subject worthy of nurturing; (2) the mentor has the time to supervise and guide the student with an acceptable project or job target which provides experiences in the real world (no "make-work" activities); and (3) the mentor must do a thorough evaluation of the student's work.

The Blue Valley School District projects usually last six to eight weeks. Hughes explains that at the end of these projects the school liaison is present during the gifted student's report to company representatives on the fruits of his work. While the project is underway, the school liaison should regularly check with the mentor on the student's progress, and with the student to determine whether he is on-time for work and is properly attired, etc.

"It's important that the students in this program be willing to put in the extra time it takes to get the full benefits of the experience," Hughes says. "The student is gone from his normal classroom work one day a week for five hours. This means having to make up missed schoolwork, in addition to doing work on the mentoring project at home."

DISCUSSION OF TWO MODERN PLAYS FOR THE GIFTED STUDENT'S SENSIBILITY:

GALILEO AND SAINT JOAN

BY MICHAEL E. WALTERS, NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"The moment he [Galileo] was set at liberty, he looked up to the sky and down to the ground, and stamping with his foot, in a contemplative mood, said, 'Eppur si move' [sic]; that is, still it moves, meaning the earth." Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo, trans. Stillman Drake (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), p. 292.

The medium of drama is a very good way to present history to the gifted since it is a fusion of both the cognitive and affective processes. The dramatic content of a play requires the cognitive powers to be used while the actual performance demands attention to one's affective skills. The plays, Galileo (1940) by Bertolt Brecht and Saint Joan (1924) by George Bernard Shaw illustrate this dual process. It is the effects of prevailing ideologies of a particular time and place upon the characters that make these two plays so intellectually stimulating and emotionally satisfying.

The main theme of both plays is the individual's conflict with the prevailing intellectual and social values of his time. While the specific conflicts have been resolved by science and politics during previous centuries (e.g., the Earth revolves around the Sun), the general predicament of mankind is still the same. In fact, the recent events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe clearly illustrate current expressions of this conflict between citizens and their government.

The need for human beings to maintain their integrity in the face of opposing social controls and institutional oppression is one of the most important social and historical issues of our times. In both of these plays, the problem of being a heretic is crucial. The heresy of both Joan of Arc (1412-31) and Galileo (1564-1642) are seen as a threat to the collective morality of each of the societies represented by Shaw and Brecht, i.e., 15th century France and 17th century Italy.

Both playwrights make the inquisitors in their plays very believable. These inquisitors actually thought they were the protectors of public morality and the social order. Galileo's observations on the motion of the planets contradicted the prevalent religious beliefs of his times. His persecutors understood that his scientific insights would destroy the current social order. "Why should we go out of our way to look for things that can only strike a discord in the ineffable harmony." (Galileo, Brecht, p. 67) Shaw demonstrates that Saint Joan was a heretical threat on three levels -- first, she challenged the accepted social/political attitude that England was "ordained" to rule France; second, her "voices" gave orders to a higher calling than those orders derived from clerical mandates; and third, her action provoked

the wrath of feudal lords because she advocated the idea of the supremacy of the monarch as a national ruler. However, her guilt was primarily based upon her feminism, and Shaw's play (written in 1924) is one of the greatest expressions of the feminist perspective. Joan presumed that she could act like a man, wear men's clothes, have a page boy's haircut, lead armies in actual combat, and live and fight with fellow-male soldiers as an equal; unfortunately, all of these led to her being burned-at-the-stake as a heretic. "But I know as a matter of plain commonsense that the woman is a rebel; and that is enough for me. She rebels against Nature by wearing man's clothes, and fighting..." (Saint Joan, Shaw, p.100)

The gifted student, through the study of these plays, can gain insights into social and political issues of 15th-17th century Europe, and be stimulated to use these historical perspectives for understanding contemporary events. The Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party describes dissenters as "poisonous weeds," and claims the suppression of the student uprising in Tienanmen Square (April-June 1989) prevented civil war.

As gifted students develop into the future leaders of our society, they will most likely have to resolve numerous conflicts between their conscience and the demands of overpowering bureaucracies. These plays are a mental and moral rehearsal for reaching a significant ethical resolution to these conflicts: Should one suppress new discoveries that might upset the social order? Must the political status quo be protected at the cost of destroying individual initiative? Near the end of Brecht's Galileo, there is an important conversation between Galileo and one of his proteges -- Andrea: "Unhappy is the land that breeds no hero." Galileo: No, Andrea: "Unhappy is the land that needs a hero." (p. 115) Dramatic moments like this demonstrate why it is important for gifted students to study plays such as these.>>

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