

GIFTED EDUCATION NEWS-PAGE

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BOOK NEWS AND REVIEWS

The books discussed in this review illustrate the extensive history of Gifted education in the United States and the present direction of this important field. Our nation's public school system is founded upon the principle of equal educational opportunities for all children regardless of race, gender, ethnic background or religious belief. This principle has been one of the major keystones of our national philosophy that has made the United States a beacon of enlightenment and hope for the world. **Underserved Gifted Populations: Responding to Their Needs and Abilities** by Joan Smutny, Editor (2003, Hampton Press, Inc.) is a testament to our national concern for educating all gifted children from different backgrounds, regardless of their ethnic and other demographic characteristics. The Editor is to be commended for the difficult task of organizing and editing this book. By focusing the ideas of many authors on this issue, she has produced a resource that is essential reading for gifted program coordinators, teachers, professors and graduate students. She has gathered the writings of 34 educators and scholars into a book that provides a comprehensive analysis of the importance of diversity in gifted education. Ms. Smutny states: "I have chosen to use the word 'underserved' rather than 'underrepresented' in order to include the great number of children who may be *represented*, yet still remain *neglected* in terms of adequate services for their educational needs. It is not enough that these students be included in gifted programming, but that they be adequately served by professionals sensitive to their unique problems and circumstances. I myself have worked with many of these populations and have seen from first-hand experience how much more needs to be done in terms of research, counseling and special programming." (pp. 1-2). The article by Dorothy Funk-Werblo entitled, *The Invisible Gifted Child*, sets the tone for the subject of underserved gifted children by emphasizing there are many educators who do not identify minorities and other groups of children for gifted programs because they use "selective vision." Other noteworthy articles in Smutny's book discuss *Ways to Promote Successful Learning for Underserved Gifted Populations* by Jerry Flack, *Achievers in Urban Schools* by Alexinia Baldwin, *Rural Gifted Students* by Patricia Hollingsworth, *The DISCOVER Assessment and Curriculum Models* by Aleene B. Nielson, and *Increasing the Potential of Minority Economically Disadvantaged Children* by Dorothy Sisk. Additional topics are concerned with gifted children whose primary language is not English, underachievers, emotionally disturbed gifted children, young gifted children, gifted girls, and highly gifted and creative children. We highly recommend **Underserved Gifted Populations** for all educators who want to increase their understanding of the concept of giftedness.

The second book included in this review demonstrates the historical roots of gifted education through the life of a pioneer in the field during the early part of the 20th century: **A Forgotten Voice: A Biography of Leta Stetter Hollingworth** by Ann G. Klein (2002, Great Potential Press, Inc.). This is an outstanding biography that shows many aspects of Hollingworth's remarkable life (1886-1939) from her pioneering existence as a child in Nebraska to her education and research accomplishments at Teachers College, Columbia University. The similarity of her concern with that of Smutny, et al. for identifying and educating children from different types of backgrounds is apparent in her book, **Gifted Children: Their Nature and Nurture** (1926). She wrote this book at Columbia University and directed one of the first programs for the gifted as part of the Speyer School (beginning in 1936) -- a joint project of the New York City Board of Education and Teachers College, Columbia University. She was particularly concerned that children from different backgrounds should attend this school. When it opened, twenty-three national backgrounds were represented. Interestingly, the author of **A Forgotten Voice** says that in the first course offered on giftedness by an American university (Teachers College, Columbia; Education 254; spring semester of 1918-1919), Hollingworth addressed four issues still of primary concern: Can public schools identify and properly educate gifted children? Should an accelerated program be used? Should an enriched curriculum be used without acceleration? Should gifted children be educated in separate schools or classes using both acceleration and enrichment? Clearly, the answers to these questions are intensely debated today, 84 years after Hollingworth originally posed them. Ann G. Klein has written a beautiful and informative book which shows how an individual from humble origins in Nebraska achieved great deeds through applying her giftedness and intense motivation to understand children with high abilities. Leta Hollingworth was a bright star of great academic accomplishments whose life was prematurely extinguished by cancer when she was the age of 53. In this regard, Klein says that Hollingworth "...endured many hardships on the prairie, which may have given her great strength and determination to retain her pioneering spirit throughout her all-too-short life." (Introduction, p. xiii). Read this book to learn about her extraordinary life.

The third book, **Educational Opportunity Guide: A Directory of Programs for the Gifted** (2003, Duke University Talent Identification Program) describes hundreds of programs for the gifted in every state and numerous "study abroad" opportunities. This compilation helps to fulfill both Hollingworth's and Smutny's desire to provide a wide range of differentiated education programs for the diverse needs of gifted students. Private school, state sponsored mathematics and science, and summer school enrichment programs are presented in this comprehensive guide for parents, their gifted children and counselors. The book also lists state department of education personnel in the gifted area, state gifted association contacts, and regional talent search centers. Further information in the last section presents a list of national organizations, national scholarships for the gifted, internet resources, independent study opportunities, and academic competitions. Middle and high school counselors should have a copy of **Educational Opportunity Guide** available for their gifted students.

CURRENT PERIODICALS

- The Winter 2003 *Understanding Our Gifted* (Volume 15, Issue 2) is an interesting theme issue entitled, ***Dumbing Down of Giftedness***. Some articles that discuss problems of identifying and testing gifted children are: “The False Security of Inclusivity” by James Delisle, “All Gifts are Equal but Some Gifts are More Equal than Others” by Miraca U.M. Gross, and “A Plea for Young Gifted Children” by Joan Smutny. Order this publication from: Open Space Communications, P.O. Box 18268; Boulder, CO 80308.
- The March 2003 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* contains an engaging article on Wynton Marsalis and jazz, “Wynton’s Blues” by David Hajdu. The article includes a statement by Ellis Marsalis (Wynton’s father who is a noted musician and music teacher in New Orleans) on the nature of talent: “. . . I used to see a lot of talent that didn't particularly go anywhere, and at first it was really mysterious to me. I couldn't really understand it – I mean, to see a seventeen-year-old kid who's a natural bass. Those are born. You don't learn to do that. And to hear coloratura sopranos who couldn't care less. I was forced to reappraise what my understanding of talent is. Then I eventually began to discover that talent is like the battery in a car. It'll get you started, but if the generator is bad, you don't go very far.” (p. 46).

Nature Studies and the Sensibility of Giftedness

By Michael E. Walters Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

“First of all I thank the keen observers. I thank those who have cared enough about nature to ask questions, explore, experiment, think, analyze, and draw cold-eyed conclusions from empirical evidence. It is they who have created the splendors of nature, some of which I have shamelessly borrowed to write about.” (p. vii, Introduction to Winter World, 2003).

It is incredible that a biologist should be so precise about what the term Sensibility means in relationship to giftedness. The above quotation by the biologist, Bernd Heinrich, aptly describes this relationship. Heinrich’s life is a constant quest and expression of keen observation. He is not merely a scientist but is also rooted in the humanities as shown by a scientific, poetic and philosophical writing style. The books he writes revolve around his own illustrations which resemble Audubon’s drawings. Heinrich is a professor of biology at the University of Vermont and resides for much of the year in the forests of western Maine.

He recently wrote a book about how certain animals are able to survive in harsh winter conditions. The book is called, Winter World: The Ingenuity of Animal Survival (2003, HarperCollins). Some examples of animals discussed in this book are bears, chickadees, squirrels, weasels, mice, turtles, toads and frogs. Before bears hibernate for the winter, they engage in a feeding frenzy in late summer and early fall. During this period they eat about five times their food intake and increase their fat layer to about five inches. Despite their amazing ability to lose their appetite during hibernation, they do not suffer from hunger when they leave their den in the spring. Snapping turtles can stay at the bottom of a pond for six months without coming up for air. During this period they are in suspended animation, but when the ice thaws, these creatures return to their previous animated state. During cold weather, toads burrow in the ground and frogs lie under matted leaves until the winter is over.

Heinrich wrote a previous book considered a masterpiece of science and literature, Mind of the Raven: Investigations and Adventures with Wolf-Birds (1999, HarperCollins), which reported extensive observations of the habits and intelligence of this bird. He found that ravens are mischievous animals who like to play tricks on people. For example, they have been known to hide golf balls so players could not find them. He also gives many examples of the high level of intelligence of these birds. In both of these books, Heinrich shows there is no dichotomy between artistic and scientific genius. He writes in a manner similar to Thoreau’s Walden, and his drawings echo both Audubon and Leonardo da Vinci. Heinrich’s most important attribute is that of being a natural observer. He loves what he does and has a deep respect for nature. While in graduate school at UCLA he had two tame ravens for pets. Heinrich’s two books are important for teachers of the gifted in order to understand the term Sensibility. “. . . Far from being a distancing, the science of biology is the opposite. It comes from an intense desire to know something intimately: you can’t hope to get closeness with the real thing unless you know its contours.” (p. viii, Introduction to Winter World, 2003). ❄️❄️❄️

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