

SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM CONSTRUCTION FOR THE GIFTED

INTRODUCTION

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The intention of this symposium on "Systematic Program Construction" is first to present a theory of differential education for the gifted; and second, to show how selected phases of program development and evaluation are related to certain aspects of the theory.

The first paper by Dr. Ward reflects a longstanding interest on his part to fill the theoretical vacuum that exists in the area education of the gifted. This paper will deal with the main dimensions of the educative process as it relates to persons with extraordinary potential for learning and creativity. He will attempt to show the practical usefulness of theory in systematic program construction, and the consequences that usually result when programs lack the guidance that a theoretical rationale can provide.

In the second paper by Miss Schifferli, selective, illustrative applications of how the theory leads to curriculum development for the gifted will be presented. An attempt will be made to show how theory forces curricular comprehensiveness and calls attention to such factors as balance, focus, and distribution of the differentiated experience.

Dr. Purkey's paper will deal with the systematic organization of a program of research; and again, the effort will be directed toward showing how the application of theory can aid the researcher in categorizing and analyzing previous studies, and in isolating new problems for attack.

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Panel

In the final paper, I will discuss how a particular approach to evaluating special programs is related to the theory of differential education for the gifted (DEG).

Certain parts of the material presented in these papers are drawn from two pieces of work currently in progress. A monograph entitled, "Differential Education for the Gifted: Program Development and Evaluation," presents both the theory and practical guidelines for implementing various aspects of differential practice. The second piece of work is a revised edition of an instrument designed to evaluate programs for the gifted. The instrument is entitled "Diagnostic and Evaluative Scales for Differential Education for the Gifted" (DESDEG); and a brief description of its general nature will be reported in the final paper.

DIFFERENTIAL EDUCATION FOR THE GIFTED: THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

by

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Introduction: An Uninviting Perspective

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way. . . Charles Dickens, Tale of Two Cities

The history of efforts in American education to conceptualize from a mountainous knowledge about persons and how they differ from each other [in potential] has been marked by contrasts as extreme as those noted by Dickens. There have been on one hand remarkably fertile periods of concern and action, and on the other, active denial and resentment. And denial has at times given way to acceptance, mainly on the expedient grounds of national interest, rather than on grounds of the democratic commitment to persons.

Throughout this history no sense of mission has emerged and become established to encapsulate the lofty insights and passions of the Leta Hollingworth of the early 1920's. Peaks in the quantity of research and publication, mainly reiterative effort, has added little to the science developed by Lewis Terman, again in the 20's. And despite the substantial support of private foundations and a growing federal interest in national projects and local school programs with the abler student in focus, we remain "hung up" on acceleration in various guises, and grouping and enrichment -- concepts and practices which once again take us back to the productive early history of this specific effort, and remind us all over again of pioneer programs in Cleveland and Pittsburgh

and New York City. And further, as was recently observed by a member of this panel (Purkey), those concerned with giftedness have sat essentially passive and undisturbed in the groundswell of great ideational forces like existential philosophy, phenomenological psychology and the developmental theories of Piaget and Bruner.

The present era, then, falls heir to this scattered and inconclusive heritage, and bears clearly the earmarks of continuation of lost opportunity. The gifted child today excites concern in thousands upon thousands of individual parents and teachers, but no effective coalition of these interests has emerged sufficiently strong to be represented in the coffers of the nation, and save for a few only, in the budgeting allocations of states and local school districts. Separate and rival professional organizations have emerged, but only sporadic gestures have been made toward a joining of hand and heart among such national and state groups in common mission for an effective role in shaping the policies and practices of the American school. Differential education for bright and talented youth today, it seems difficult to deny, is existent virtually in name only if program and practices embody any conceptual rigor at all. It stands undersold in conception by major projects; absorbed by exciting advances in general education; overshadowed by popular concerns with creativity and cultural disadvantage; and dwarfed in material support by other types of exceptionality among persons. We must select, it seems, from Dickens, and paraphrase, in order squarely to face an uninviting situation: ". . . it is the worst of times; it is the age of foolishness; it is the epoch of incredulity; it is the season of Darkness. . .".

The Function of Science and Theory in Educational Practice

With this kind of hair shirt on his back, the prophet of gloom of course traditionally has his ready prescription for a new and better day. And in a sense, but hopefully a sense appropriately disciplined by reason and reality, the present series of papers do represent what the respective authors feel is one essential and promising avenue toward improvement of the darksome course and unfulfilled history just cited. And in that the effort to form out of research and observation and reflective thought some integrated, rational or theoretical scheme that involves a certain specificity of conception, coherence in purpose, and exactness in practice, comprises a rare if not unique endeavor in this field, it seems reasonable that some good at least, and possibly a great deal of it, may ensue. This, then (as Dr. Renzulli has indicated) is the objective of the effort in which we on this program are engaged: to bring together in an integrated pattern what science and examined experience offer to the educational practitioner, and to show how a program of differential education can be related in every significant detail to this embodiment of science in theory.

But "theory" has for too long been a misunderstood concept, a threat to the very practitioner to whom it has greatest relevance and greatest promise. Empirical science is rather generally conceded to be the ultimate taskmaster in shaping the character of action that leads toward man's ideals and aspirations. Both the quantity of educational research and its increasing sophistication are distinguishing characteristics of the contemporary period of American education. But research is necessarily confined to specific bits and pieces of a whole problem, and as such it is inert and sterile until picked up and fitted into a purposeful scheme, directed

toward a recognizable problem or objective in human affairs. It is this picking up and putting together of tested observations and research findings which is the function of the educational theorist. And it is those theories in particular which do comprise a consistent and harmonious pattern among isolated bits of insight and information which provide a basis for further empirical research. It can be seen, thus, that scientific research begins in theory; and it properly ends in theory as well, in that well designed inquiries contribute toward filling in the pattern which, while whole enough at some point in time to support inquiry, remains always in need of further refinement and modification.

And theory is necessary to practice when practice is effectively geared to the achievement of specific purposes. Theory in its relevance to practice is something, and it does something. It is by nature an identification of salient elements and processes within a given realm of interest; and it is an organization of these elements into a functional pattern which embodies, manifests or explains the task or phenomenon as a whole.

To complete the present analysis, theory also does something; in fact it makes possible a number of quite significant and desirable effects in the arena of practical action. The ideational blueprint, like that on the architect's drawing board, disciplines what is done in actual practice. That is it specifies the nature and purpose of various parts by revealing their place within the organized whole, and this specificity of identification encourages exactitude in action. This kind of identity and localization serves further to encourage balance and comprehensiveness of function in that neglected or over-attended parts of the whole are conspicuous when the whole is in clear perspective. And finally for the present, this clear and manifest

relationship between part and whole provides a basis for systematic prediction of the effects of any segment of the phenomenon in focus, for pinpointing difficulties and for evaluating given elements or processes essential to the task in its ideal dimensions.

The Proposed Theory of Differential Education for the Gifted: Toward
Systematic Program Development and Evaluation

But so much for abstractions as such. This program itself, with all its to-do over theory and system, is practical in nature; and we must proceed to the specific practical involvements in the development of educational experience appropriately directed to the behavioral potentialities of the able learner and talented performer. So we ask the questions at this point: "What is this particular theory (the one basic to the present symposium on "Systematic Program Construction" and representing the forthcoming monograph)?" And "What does this particular theory do?" These questions will be answered in close conformity to the indications above concerning the respective relationships and mutual contributions of theory to science, of science to theory, and of theory to practice in human affairs in general.

First, the proposed theory of differential education for the gifted identifies salient features of the problem, these being primarily, (1) the characteristics or potentialities for experience and performance which reliably distinguish the positive deviant; and (2) the salient features of the particularized developmental experience (curricular design, supported by appropriate program organization and operation) which these distinguishing potentialities make possible and which evoke and shape them progressively toward optimal strength and approved uses. In the text of the monograph, each of these main dimensions in a two dimensional matrix are explained in the light of tested observations and research, and the

relationships between adjacent or intersecting elements and processes are taken into account by way of depicting on the whole the process of human development through experience, with emphasis on superiority of potential.

For the purpose of this program, a summary "Chart of the Theoretical Rationale" will suffice as a reference. The ensuing papers will, whatever else their respective authors have chosen to do, refer in the respective contexts of curriculum and research and program evaluation to specific junctures in this matrix to illustrate the applications of the theory in segment after segment of a program of differential education. In view of these particular indications that are to follow, the present reference to the chart will be in the nature of an overview, a peripheral tour that prepares for but will not preempt what follows.

You are invited first to note Column (1) in the chart, the title of which is "Experiential and Behavioral Potentiality." In this portion of the system, a structure is provided within which all principal forms of giftedness can be accommodated and this in a manner leading into further involvements by way of educative process. Let us note that in the three cells in this column (b and c being the same) three generic potentialities of the person are taken into account: namely (a) his possible, but not certain superiority in some degree in dynamic or temperamentl traits; (b) and (c) his general intellectual superiority; and (d) his particular cognitive peaks or talents - experiential or behavioral. These elements in the theory in each instance, it is purported, respect and involve research evidence, this being perhaps most readily perceived in the generalization that specific talent is ordinarily buttressed by above average general intelligence. No attempt is made to specify in the theory how many or what kinds of specific aptitudes that are presently identifiable and amenable to school experience, but there is a locus for each and every talent so identified. The bottom cell

in this column, as in the others across the chart, is summary in nature, embodying in compacted phraseology all that is allowed for in the cells above.

Column (2) is virtually self-explanatory, what we term "developmental objectives" being principally an indigenous transposition of what is indicated in the initial cell as potential into a phrasing suggesting what purpose in each instance resides in the educative processes geared to the particular trait pattern and leading to the product identified in column (5). Cells 2 b and 2 c, both dependent upon general intellectual superiority, do require brief explanation, and may indeed be somewhat controversial. In the first of these, "conceptual development," the stage is set for the acquisition of information of any and all sorts, and in the second, "intellectual development," the intended meaning involves experience which by its nature tends to affect cognitive structure, or biological tissue, insofar as such basic effects are in fact possible.

Columns (3) and (4) depict as the next paper will indicate in some detail, the nature of those developmental experiences intended to advance each particular potentiality and related objective. Column (5) depicts in language so compact that without the text the meaning may be difficult to follow, the person developed as product out of the various lines of experience arranged throughout childhood and youth, and bearing specifically upon those experiential potentialities which he as an individual manifests.

The bottom row, as indicated a moment ago, summarizes in each respective column the aspect of education involved, and the last cell of all, bottom of column (5), is the residual point upon which all the educative forces converge. Again in overly compacted phrases, one can sense an idealized embodiment of conventional educational goals, transformed toward the

distinguishing superior potentialities of the gifted person.

Now with this explanation in hand of what the proposed theory is comprised of, what the theory does must in the interest of time be depicted more briefly. It will help remain away from the ensuing papers also, if we think at this point in terms of phases or problems in a school program, rather than of curricular experience per se. By and large, it is purported that this theoretical rationale allows us to locate every significant phase of an actual program of differential education in a local school or school system, to identify by this location the nature of the operation or provision and its proper function, and through this kind of identification to shape the program in all the dimensions suggested earlier to be the relevance of theory to practice. The existence of the explicit general system tends to force attention, that is, to all necessary aspects of a program, to direct the shaping of these respective elements into exact accord which the place in theory indicates, and to set the stage for systematic prediction and evaluation of the efficacy of any part of process within the program.

Experienced observers of functioning programs know that these usually include, or should do so, a statement of philosophy and objectives, a plan for student identification and placement, a considerable amount of attention to the teacher - his selection and training- and always in sentiment, if far less in actuality, some built in device for evaluation. Both the chapters in the forthcoming monograph and the "key features" in the evaluation system to which Renzulli's original research was addressed include treatments of all aspects of program. And in the discussions, pervasive and systematic reference to the theory, it is trusted, will in fact fulfill the promise of those virtues indicated earlier in this paper to reside in a practical enterprise guided at every step by theoretical rationale.

Concluding Perspective: Time for Transformation

And now finally to round out this introductory overview, let us be reminded briefly of the opening note of pessimism, of a problem area of potentially great significance floundering and without main form or essence across a history of a half century in which behavioral sciences have marched toward maturity and a half dozen ideologies and movements and social climates have emerged and passed; a problem poorly conceived in terms of contemporary thought and badly managed in terms of contemporary practice; in short a problem area without lodging or subsistence in the world of professional education, and a human concern as yet, figuratively without mind or soul.

There may well be a dozen avenues of renewed or innovative endeavors required to rectify this discomfiting course of history; but once again the present effort is submitted for what it may be worth in attempting to turn the course of events. If Dicken's eloquent language may be invoked once again, then perhaps we may suggest that it is a 'time for transformation' in this concern -- a transformation from isolated, particular and ad hoc conceptions, caught as though at random from the air, to systematic, rational conceptualization as a basis for ordering and operating all essential aspects of developmental experience relevant to the task of evoking and directing great human abilities. Fond as he obviously is of early students of this problem, perhaps the speaker may be indulged at this final point a quote from Hollingworth: "How shall a democracy educate its most educable? There is no more important question in all American education."

Differential Education for the Gifted: A Chart of the Theoretical Rationale (VSW, 1968)

| (1) Experiential and Behavioral Potentiality | (2) Developmental Objectives | (3) Curricular Design: Developmental Experience | | (4) Process: Learning and Instruction | (5) Goals, Outcomes: Actualize Experiential and Behavioral Potentiality |
|--|---|---|--|--|--|
| a) Ordinary emotional response potentiality plus possible extremes in temperament, sensitivity. | Personal Development | Substance: Knowledge of, and about Arts and Sciences; Values: Behavioral Skills | Value information; valuat- ional and affective situational experience and activity. | Cognitive and situational experience and guidance involving motive and emotion. | Mature, healthy personalit actualized self with con- structive and gratifying i volvement of productive or creative disposition. |
| b) Superior intellec- tive potentiality, moderate to extreme. | Conceptual Development | Substance: Knowledge of, and about Arts and Sciences; Values: Behavioral Skills | All knowledge and deriva- tive activity arranged in an epistemological taxonomy. | Lifetime learning and be- havioral development; Main- ly personal exploration ac- cording to interest or need; instruction and social inter- action only where these significantly facilitate in- dividual learning and per- formance. | Understanding and skill of every nature and in whatev degree required by the actualized self for satis- fying experience. |
| c) (Superior intel- lective potentiality, moderate to extreme.) | Intellectual Development | Substance: Knowledge of, and about Arts and Sciences; Values: Behavioral Skills | Any knowledge or activity involving these complex mental processes subject to structural or functional modification through ex- perience. | Functional exercise, super- vision and evaluation in- volving available intel- lective potentiality. | Optimally developed poten- tiality for general intel- lective operations: reflec- tive, critical, creative. |
| d) Extreme superiority in localized exper- iential and behavior- al potentiality. | Aptitude Development | Substance: Knowledge of, and about Arts and Sciences; Values: Behavioral Skills | Relevant technical know- ledge or activity in full subtlety and complexity; systematic knowledge of one or more particular fields. | Sustained, exacting ex- perience, supervised and evaluated in light of most sophisticated developmental theory and technology. | Extraordinary understanding and skill, localized; actue ized talent. |
| All significant, identi- fiable human potential- ties sufficiently ex- treme to warrant spec- ial treatment. | Integrative development of all signifi- cant exceptional potentialities | Substance: Knowledge of, and about Arts and Sciences; Values: Behavioral Skills | Every significant kind of knowledge and human activity utilized as required by and for the individual in life long personal growth and contributory social interaction. | Optimally developed, con- tinually becoming person, free and responsible uni- versalized human mind and character, educated for social and cultural inter- action. | |