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A STUDY OF THE GIFTED AND
A PROPOSED PROGRAM FOR
THE ACADEMICALLY TALENTED
ELEMENTARY PUPIL

A Paper
Presented to the Faculty of
Eastern Illinois University
In Education 586

In Partial Fulfillment
Of The Requirements For The Degree
Master Of Science In Education

Plan B

By
George E. Troutt, Jr.,
July 1962

PREFACE

Through research and experience of teachers in the elementary field, we have learned that an early identification of the academically talented youngster can be made. Since this identification can be made at an early age, the elementary school is an excellent place to begin the processes of helping this academically talented student to strive toward the achievements of his full capacities. Those with teaching experience have noted that many of our elementary schools have not given the academically talented student the opportunity to work to his full capacity. Therefore this study is concerned with this problem and endeavors to propose a program that can be used in the elementary school to help the academically talented student.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	ii
Chapter	
I. HISTORY OF THE STUDY.....	1
II. SELECTING PUPILS.....	3
General Qualifications for Selecting Pupils	
Specific Qualifications for Selecting Pupils	
III. THE PROPOSED PROGRAM.....	7
IV. IN SUPPORT OF A SPECIAL INTERESTS CLASS	13
V. SUMMARY.....	17
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	19

CHAPTER I

HISTORY OF THE STUDY

In 1959 a committee of teachers in District 301, Tuscola, Illinois spent one year of study on the problem of identifying and presenting a curriculum for academically talented children. During this study it occurred to the committee that there were several students in the elementary schools who demonstrated outstanding abilities and special interests in various academic fields. Recognition of this fact led to further study to find ways for additional opportunities to be provided for them. The committee decreased in size with the assistance of the Superintendent, and spent the following year studying possibilities for such a program. During this year of study and investigation of the programs or projects currently being pursued, the committee decided upon a proposed program.

Since the Superintendent was in favor of the committee's work and had given so much time and help to the study, he recommended that the committee put the program into effect and evaluate as it progressed. The Board of Education was in favor of the studies and was very receptive to the idea of putting the committee's proposal into action. With the support of the Superintendent and the Board of Education, the committee devoted another year in working out details for the program and made further study of similar projects

that were being tried or had been tried. A report was to be ready for presentation to the Board of Education in March 1961. Before this report could be given, a political storm broke, and the Board of Education changed considerably during the upheaval. The Superintendent was caught among the repercussions of the heated Board election and decided to retire at the end of the school year, 1961.

These events came as a great shock to the chances of enacting the proposed program and, as the committee learned later, eliminated its chances for immediate testing. With the many changes that occurred on the Board of Education, and in the administrative staff, it was now impossible to put the program into action.

The writer's concern has not decreased. In fact, interest is greater than ever in a program for the academically talented pupil.

It becomes purposeful, therefore, to present, first of all, a program for the academically talented pupils in the elementary schools. Second, perhaps the study will contribute something to the overwhelming task of challenging our gifted pupils while they are learning in our schools. Third, definite conclusions cannot be drawn; however some facts have come to the writer's attention in a study of this kind.

CHAPTER II

SELECTING PUPILS

General Qualifications For Selecting Pupils

There seems to be a tendency to speak of the gifted student in association with IQ only. As this association seems to pass with consumption of many other ideas about the gifted, there appears to be some general conception that many factors make up an academically talented student.

The writer's early study of this proposed program revealed that other writers, teachers, speakers etc. referred to the gifted and never seemed to mention aptitude, special interests, special talents, and high achievers in particular fields of study.

To give some idea of the broad scope that could be used in selecting students for this program, qualifications are listed which the writer has found in his readings.

1. IQ ranges were from lower limit of 120 to 130.

The writer found no program, proposed or in existence with qualifications of IQ lower than 120.

2. Ability to solve problems
3. Knowledge of subject matter
4. Interest in school
5. Research skills

6. Ability to work independently
7. Status in peer group
8. Critical thinking ability
9. Ability to see relationships
10. Rapport with teacher
11. Motivation toward learning
12. Basic skills
13. Intellectual curiosity
14. Ability to accept responsibility
15. Ability to experiment with things and ideas
16. Self understanding
17. Acceptance of leadership

This list of qualifications gives some idea of the requisites to use, but the degree of success in each category the student possesses is left to the discretion of the screening committee.

Specific Qualifications For Selecting Pupils

When analyzing general qualifications for selecting children for the proposed program, they seemed too broad and would not be workable. Since this program relies more on special interests, academic skills, and higher levels of aptitude, the writer chose the following specific qualifications by which to judge the students that are being selected for the project.

1. Lower limit of IQ to be 120
2. Achieves in regular class work

In an interview with a teacher of a similar program being conducted in one of the Freeport Schools of Freeport, Illinois, the writer learned that some boys and girls had been chosen for their program, but the classroom teachers gave evidence that some of the students were not achieving in their regular classroom work. This caused some questioning by the faculty and a mild complication. The writer feels that this is an essential qualification to maintain the backing of the entire faculty, which is, in turn, essential to the entire program.

3. Intellectual curiosity
4. Ability to experiment with things and ideas
5. Ability to work independently
6. Ability to accept responsibility
7. Knowledge of special subject matter of interest to the student
8. Research skills
9. Critical thinking ability
10. Self motivation of learning

Since the program is concerned with the further development of special interests, it might be best to steer away from too strong an emphasis on IQ. These special interests are usually discovered first by the classroom teacher. The counselor or counselors might

validate the classroom teacher's opinion with individual tests. If everything seems to point to an extremely strong interest and high level of aptitude in a given field, then the screening committee can proceed to check the qualifications listed before.

It seems as though a lot of emphasis is placed on the classroom teacher's judgment. Since the classroom teacher works closely and individually with his students, it is only appropriate that he be the key to open the door for advanced success of the academically talented students. The classroom teacher is responsible for our first step in identifying and choosing the academically talented student.

The second step should be conducted by the counselor or counselors in the school. The counselor can give support by individual testing on the first step, or he might show evidence that the student is not qualified for the program.

If the counselor supports the classroom teacher's opinion, the third step in choosing goes to a screening committee. The screening committee concerns its work with checking the qualifications list and recommends or refuses to accept a referred student. This committee should be chosen by the faculty, and through faculty discussion there should be a decision as to whom should serve on the committee.

CHAPTER III

THE PROPOSED PROGRAM

In starting a program for the academically talented, first consider four basic concepts.

1. There must be public support for this type of program.
2. School board must be willing to spend the money.
3. Superintendent should be democratic in administration.
4. The school system or school where the program is begun should have a co-operative faculty and counseling service.¹

A discussion with the teachers of Douglas School, Freeport, Illinois revealed that they felt a cooperative faculty had been the main support of their "Special Project Class". After this discussion and some added thought, it occurred to the writer that the experience in Freeport was significant.

When the program was being discussed and formed in Tuscola, Illinois, the Superintendent was enthused, eager and very cooperative. This is necessary to achieve the establishment of such a program. His contact with the board and the general public can aid in so many ways, and his support must be strong.

The counseling service is advantageous in many ways, but it is possible to begin without this service. Programs that are already in existence do not always

¹J. C. Gowan, "Starting a Program for Gifted Children," Education, Indianapolis, Indiana: February, 1960, pp 337-340

have counseling service.

Fourth, fifth and sixth graders were considered for the "Special Interests Program". The committee proposed that teachers in the system furnish a list of fourth, fifth and sixth grade children who showed special interests. The committee would screen to the top twenty children. This screening process was described in Chapter I. These twenty children would have access to a large room, which was chosen in one of the schools, to pursue, individually, their special interests. These interests could possibly be one of the following fields of endeavor:

1. Gathering and writing material of many forms
2. Science projects
3. Preparation of dramatic or historical facts
4. Clay modeling and ceramics
5. Leather work
6. Puppets
7. Composition of words and music
8. Written prose, verse and short stories
9. Reading extensively
10. Research reports on diverse subjects such as:
Lives of Great Men; Vocabulary of Geometry;
History of Time
11. Diaries of research work on animals or any available animal group which is included in their environment

This list is an indication of what these students might undertake. The committee felt that this was such a flexible and individual thing that it would be impossible to list all the fields of knowledge that gifted children might pursue.

The "Special Interests Program" room size, 30 x 60 feet, was formerly used for industrial arts. The room would house as many books as could be afforded initially. Fifty dollars per pupil was a conservative estimate with which to start the library. More books were to be added as the class progressed.

The large room that was chosen would also include the following basic equipment:

1. Work tables which are adequate to handle small and large extensive projects
2. As many sets of encyclopedias as are on the market and suitable for school use
3. Two portable science laboratories; one equipped for Physics and the other for Chemistry
4. One wall--60 feet long--equipped with library facilities
5. General supplies of the school in which the class is located made accessible, including all forms of art, paper, and other miscellaneous supplies
6. Accessible materials from the High School Library
7. Tape recorder
8. Room equipped with a sink and adjoining work area

This equipment is very fundamental, and as the class progresses, there would be changes in equipment and space.

The choice of a teacher for the "Special Interests Program" seemed, at first, to be an impossible task. After further study on this point, the committee found that it wasn't as insurmountable as it had appeared.

Since it is true that the teacher is the cornerstone of our educational structure, what then are the qualifications for the teacher of the gifted? Also, in what ways, if any, do the qualifications for the teacher of the gifted differ from those for the teacher of other pupils?²

A Chicago study which was made over a five year period showed evidence that no matter what educational program is being pursued, the ultimate success of such a program is dependent on quality teaching. The program in Tuscola would have been no different in this light. A list of qualifications, written by children who had been active in classes for the gifted, submitted the following qualities that they wanted in their teachers. In the opinion of the writer, these qualities are possessed by any good teacher.

Sense of Humor He should have a good sense of humor. A teacher should be able to have fun and teach school at the same time.

Encouragement of Responsibility A good teacher should let pupils talk things over with their friends. He should be able to give the student an assignment and then let him go to work without interrupting him.

²Joseph L. French, Educating the Gifted, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1959, p 432.

Knowledge of Subject. A teacher, as well as knowing his subject well, must keep his knowledge up to date. He should read the daily newspaper. It would be very embarrassing if a student should report something very important that the teacher did not know anything about.

Firmness and Fairness. He should be strict so the children obey him, but not so strict that the children are afraid of him. In my opinion I think a teacher should be strict but gentle and he should have a friendly personality.

Understanding of Children. A teacher who knows his pupils, not only as boys and girls he sees in school, and tries to teach academic subjects and help to become good citizens, but also as individual people with individual problems is in my opinion an extremely good teacher. He should be the kind of a teacher that if you have a problem you could go and explain it to him.

Enjoyment of Teaching. First of all, I think that to be a good teacher you must want to teach and you must enjoy teaching.³

If you would raise the above characteristics of a good teacher to a high point of development, one would have a gifted teacher for gifted pupils.

Programs which are already operating show that there is a wide range of practices in the students' time spent in the "Special Interests Program". At first the committee felt that the students should spend one half day each day in the program, but it was later decided that the time element could not be exact. As individual pursuits take form, the time spent in the "Special Interests Program" would vary. It would be best to leave the time spent in the class to individual requirements for their interests, and the time, therefore,

³Ibid, p 434.

could be determined by the student's pursuit, and the regular classroom teacher's suggestions and recommendations.

Actually, all good teaching is team work with the many varied aspects of the entire school working together. This program is no exception. It would take team work with the regular classroom teachers, the policies of the school, and all special areas of education, to succeed in teaching a "Special Interests Class".

CHAPTER IV

IN SUPPORT OF A SPECIAL INTERESTS CLASS

It must be made clear that by support, the writer does not mean support of this particular program alone. Past studies and research have shown that schools must do something for our academically talented children or lose them in the years when their basic intellectualities should be stimulated for a life of personal fulfillment, leadership and excellence. A program for the academically talented pupils is not new in a sense, but in another way of looking at it, the schools have merely begun to offer these students an opportunity to pursue their interests and to excel in their particular fields of endeavor. In the early years when foundations for their futures are being laid, it is so important that schools offer opportunities to all of our elementary students, no matter where they rank academically.

Details vary, but the typical procedure in partial grouping or special classes is for the gifted child to spend most of the school day in heterogeneously grouped classes and to work with a special group at designated periods throughout the week. The special classes may meet once a week or more often, and usually the child is limited to a special class in one area. Under this arrangement, the child has the opportunity to live and work with children of varying abilities, but the organization permits added enrichment.¹

¹National Education Association and Department of Elementary Principals, Elementary Education And The Academically Talented Pupil, A bulletin from National Education Association, Washington D.C., 1961, p 56.

An analysis made by James J. Gallagher brings out the following:

The evaluation of educational programs for gifted children have not been common nor too well done from a research standpoint. However they do suggest the following tentative conclusions:

- a. When ability grouping is accompanied by a special program designed for gifted children, meaningful improvement in a variety of areas is seen in the children.
- b. Acceleration, when applied as a part of an organized program, does not seem to result in any damage to the student and many times seems to result in academic improvement. One or two years of acceleration would seem to be the maximum during a twelve year public school career, except in very unusual cases.
- c. There is some suggestion that the initiation of special programs may result in a realignment of friendships, but this realignment is apparently minor.
- d. Anticipated unfavorable side effects of the initiation and conduct of such special programs for the gifted, such as parental protests, social ostracism, snobbiness etc., do not seem to be realized in the great majority of instances.²

Student responses to the programs now being conducted are not abundant, but occasionally one can find questionnaires that have been prepared with the responses tabulated. Fifth and sixth graders in California remarked:

I like being with the kids in the special classes. They seem more friendly and better behaved than those in our regular classes.³

²James J. Gallagher, "Analysis of Research on The Education of Gifted Children," Special Study Project from State of Illinois Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Springfield, Illinois, 1960, pp 130-131

³California State Department of Education. Educational Programs for Gifted Pupils, State Department of Education, Sacramento, California. January, 1961, p 124.

I have always been considered younger and sort of stupid, but now I have a chance to prove to myself that I am not as stupid as they say or feel. I think I have really learned something.⁴

It has helped me to judge facts and to find information; ability to work by myself; and the curiosity of learning and experimenting with new things.⁵

It has taught me many things. Normally I would not have learned this knowledge in years . . .⁶

I believe that it has been a great help to me, since before this class started I was bored with school work; it was too easy. This class has afforded me more advanced work--much more interest.⁷

A California report on educational programs for the gifted revealed several findings which the writer thinks are pertinent to any program for the academically talented children.

In academic achievement alone, the experimental program students compared to the control group made significant gains in reading and arithmetic. Other areas showed gains which were not astronomical but indicative of reward for the money and effort expended.

Parents, pupils and teachers felt the programs had provided opportunities that these boys and girls would otherwise not have had.

⁴Ibid., p 124.

⁵Ibid., p 124.

⁶Ibid., p 124.

⁷Ibid., p 124

Not only did the programs provide the opportunities, but also high achievement was evident on many levels.

The California study showed that the problems were in existence. The most eminent problem shown was the lack of proper communication between the school and parents where a special program was being conducted. This seems to be true of our regular school and classroom work. If the public is not informed properly and correctly of procedures and results, then the schools are in a difficult situation. The writer believes that we can not only maintain Special Interests Programs but also improve them as the schools, teachers, parents and pupils work in a common purpose for educational growth.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The world is changing so fast that people have difficulty in perceiving that which is truly happening. These rapid changes bring about complex problems and situations. It takes the very best of many people to cope merely with daily routines. The students who graduate from our schools face these problems in every phase of their lives. The writer feels strongly about obligations to them and to the society in which all live and work. This obligation is to their future and possible success or failure.

It is indefensible to permit one of our greatest sources of leadership to dwindle away without any effort on the part of those in education to provide the academically talented students with opportunities which they need and deserve.

The evidence points toward special programs for the gifted from an academic achievement standpoint. The social point of view shows evidence from educational psychologists that friendship for the gifted is vital.

Assuming that close friendship, that genuine interaction with other persons does many favorable things--such as increasing the socialization of the individual, making his life more satisfying, widening and deepening his "power field", establishing and maintaining general mental health--then it is urgent that

arrangements be made for intellectually gifted children which will offer them appropriate social contacts to enable them to build friendships. It seems highly probable that when the gifted child is externally bound to persons of lower mental age, who are less flexible and less rich in personality differentiation of the person, he is then, in effect, an isolated individual for whom activities tend to drop dead, and for whom there is malnutrition in the areas of close friendship.¹

The writer believes the above statements indicate a need and persons in education can and must provide an opportunity for the fulfillment of such a need.

From an economic point of view, the writer believes that the leadership which the academically talented can eventually give in every phase of our American culture will tend to give this nation new areas of research, new jobs, and new techniques for our entire society, so that it can continue to progress and prosper.

Finally, the writer feels that no conclusion can be drawn from a study of this type, but the tentative conclusions and the indications are so strong that instituting a "Special Interests Program" can be worth while, successful and commendable.

¹Harriet E. O'Shea, "Friendship And The Intellectually Gifted Child," Exceptional Children, Volume XXVI, No. 6 (February, 1960), p 335.

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