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Helping and Understanding the Gifted Child

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Report on
Helping and Understanding
the
GIFTED CHILD

Prepared by
Lois Cox

HONORS PROJECT

Fall 1974

Dr. Watson
Advisor

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The Gifted

The gifted child has been referred to as--superior, genius, and brilliant. The child who falls into this category seems to have outstanding ability in intelligence. Giftedness might be defined as: "outstanding creative ability in any one or more of a number of areas of human achievements."¹

As with all children, the mind must be stimulated in order to produce creative work. Many times, the gifted child has been over-looked in the common classroom. Some teachers label these children as daydreamers or stupid. When the child's high intelligence was discovered, and they were given challenging work, the change was unbelievable. Many gifted children are discontented as a result of not being taught how to handle their knowledge. The gifted child can also become lazy because he accomplishes the required work so easily. Repeating what he already knows begins to bore him. This child eventually begins to regard all schoolwork as drill and not worth his effort. This is where aggressive behavior begins to develop in the child.

This aggressive behavior can be handled when the gifted child becomes interested enough in his work to want to keep trying.

Every child should be given an opportunity to find his own interests and abilities. The gifted child also needs to learn and experience like other children. After the child has found where his interest lies, the teacher is an important tool in helping to develop it. The pupil who knows that he can spend free time as he wishes, may neglect to study the assignment thoroughly. The hardest subjects are naturally the ones that a gifted child, like other children, neglects the most, although they may be most important toward his interest. Previous teachers can be of great assistance by informing the future teacher about the interests that a gifted child may have. The guidance of the gifted is a project for many people in order to develop their fullest potential.

Like all children, the gifted child lacks knowledge, experience, judgment, physical and social maturity. With guidance from teachers, parents, and others, the child can develop more quickly than other children.

Bright children are usually superior physically and in social and emotional adjustment. Gifted children are usually superior to other children in these areas: ²

1. size of vocabulary and accurate use of words.
2. ability to make generalizations.
3. abstract thinking
4. insight into problems
5. reasoning
6. problem solving
7. speed of learning
8. persistence
9. memory
10. foresight
11. humor and wit
12. alertness and keenness of observation
13. creative ability
14. critical judgment
15. desire to be of service.
16. initiative

The gifted child can be identified in many, many ways. Alertness to quality of anything that an individual does is one way of detecting a bright child. This type of child enjoys many hobbies. He may shift them very rapidly but he is likely to gain a surprisingly expert knowledge in the ones that hold his interest. Books tell a lot about a child's ability. The number of books read, difficulty in reading and vocabulary, and type are important factors that can be compared with other children. Many children with exceptional knowledge and ability, have taught themselves to read by the age of 3 and some at 2. A librarian can play a special part in finding gifted children because they see the child when he looks for books of his interest. She can recognize his reading habits usually before anyone else.

Creativity requires both sensitivity and independence. A child learns creatively by questioning, inquiring, searching, manipulating, experimenting, and even by aimless play. There is no substitution for a child's personal observation. The child needs the experiencing for himself the many things that make up his world.

Too many children are expected to give the teacher a ready-made answer from adults. In order to give more creative thinking into the process, children need to learn how to sustain a question, to play with it, toss it back and forth, and finally--refine it.

Several rewards for creative thinking could involve such principles as:

1. treat unusual questions with respect.
2. treat unusual ideas with respect.
3. show children that their ideas have value.
4. provide opportunities for self-initiated learning and give credit.
5. provide periods of non-evaluated practice or learning.

It is most important that primary and elementary school level children receive more supplementary material. More personal problems arise during the period before twelve years of age. A gifted child is characterized many times by his originality and curiosity. This can lead to problems in a classroom because the child has a lack of interest in the routine of the subject studied.

Many times emotional problems may block or hinder a child. An emotionally disturbed child may daydream so much that he does little or no schoolwork. These emotional blocks interfere with the working of the mind. Psychotherapy can sometimes remedy this problem.

Although gifted children show fewer signs of instability than children generally, they seem to have feelings of inferiority. They seem to have a lot of insecurity in physical activities. One reason is that it takes the gifted child longer to learn games such as baseball or skating than it does intellectual skills. The gifted child seems to dwell on intellectual activities and therefore, causes himself to be left out of the group. The gifted child may feel socially inadequate because he is smaller and younger than the other children if he has been allowed to progress in school according to his ability.

In order to cope with the problem of a gifted child becoming shy, unsocial, and undeveloped, a teacher can create an atmosphere of friendly acceptance. A group

discussion can be used to talk about social relationships. This can help the gifted child by allowing him to listen to his classmates opinions about social growth. Many bright adolescents, by their own efforts, create an acceptable social attitude.

If a teacher suspects that she may have a gifted child in her classroom, she should make a special effort to talk with him privately. He may respond to her interest and reveal abilities which he has hidden out of shyness. A detection of how frequently a pupil volunteers or is chosen by his classmates for creative work can be a good observation to be made by the teacher. A gifted child's work needs to be compared with the productions of his contemporaries, and not by adult standards. In the example of creating writing, cuteness should be avoided. The real creative child is one that helps the reader to feel what the writer is trying to convey.

Many gifted children learn differently than their average classmates. Gifted children are hindered when they are grouped throughout their school years with children of average ability.

Too, many times the gifted child is held back by the other students. A teacher does not have very much time to individually instruct the superior child as to the more creative uses of a subject. She usually has time to instruct the basic concepts of learning. It is very important that parents and teachers watch for signs of this type of a child so that encouragement can be used as soon as possible.

Many children are allowed to skip grades if they are capable of accomplishing the designated work. There are both disadvantages and advantages to this type of education.

The bright pupil who jumps ahead is in the situation of associating with classmates who are more nearly his equal in mental intelligence. He gains much from the competition and has more contact with people who have the same interests. The child who follows this route is capable of finishing his education sooner, and begin his own career.

One woman that I know personally, seems to have done the above description of education. She was a very intelligent person and was able to graduate from High School at the age of thirteen. As she was growing up, this person was proud of her abilities, but did not realize the importance of the usual childhood experiences. Her parents allowed her to enter college at this young age and she received her degree at the age of seventeen. One problem that she related to me was that of teaching school

to students who were older than herself. This particular person missed much during the growing-up stage. She also will admit this and encourages others to take the time to be a child.

Too many children are excluded from the group because they are not physically matured enough. This causes the gifted child to rely upon his intellectual background and become a "bookworm" in order to receive recognition.

After reviewing the arguments concerning skipping grades, I personally feel that it is very dangerous to the child to do so. I believe that the child will not gain all of the growth--physically, mentally, and socially to their greatest potential that is necessary to develop a normal person.

The only way that I might consent to allowing a child to skip to a higher grade would be if the child had older friends in the next grade. This would allow the child to have the social background that is needed. Size can also be a great help to the gifted child. If a child is big for his age, he can adjust to his older peers easier. A child is usually "picked" upon if he is much smaller than the rest of the group. The child also needs to be excelling in all of the subjects and not just in one area. A gifted child would be hindered if passed only because he was very good in the area of math. Each subject is necessary in order to compliment each area of learning.

As a teacher, I have the conviction that the student who is capable of achieving beyond the average education load should be encouraged with supplementary materials. This could be done with many items of interest. I would suggest that the students be the main ones to choose the particular research that is to be done in a field.

The following is a list of ideas that will enable the average classroom teacher more insight as the interests of the gifted child:

1. Suppose you could listen regularly to only 3 radio stations. Which would you choose?
2. Suppose you were to be given the 3 books you have enjoyed most. Which would you choose?
3. Suppose you were to be given three records of any music that you liked. Which would you choose?
4. Suppose you could see three movies over again. Which would you choose?
5. Suppose there were only 3 games played at school. Which would you choose?
6. Suppose you could have any hobby in the world? Which would you choose?
7. Suppose you could see regularly any 3 television programs. Which would you choose?
8. Suppose you could have 3 wishes come true. Which would you choose?

If necessary, a broader survey of interests could be taken by using the following questions:

1. What five things do you like to play best?
2. Is there anything you like to do better than play?
3. Would you rather play by yourself or with other children?
4. To what clubs or organizations do you belong?
5. Do you take any special lessons outside of school? What kind? Do you enjoy them?
6. Is there another kind of lesson that you would prefer to take?
7. What tools or toys do you have at home?
8. How often do you go to the movies?
9. What stage plays have you seen?
10. Have you ever gone to a concert?
11. Do you enjoy reading? What are some books you have been reading during the last two months?
12. What newspapers do you read? What sections do you enjoy best?
13. Name your favorite magazines.
14. What things have you been doing the past two weeks just because you wanted to? 3

This could help the gifted child to discover himself and talents while in the educational system. It is very important that they do so while they are young and interested in many things. The teacher holds the fate of the gifted child in her hands. All resources should be used to enrich his experiences.

The teacher needs to be aware of her pupils in the classroom. She needs to make sure that none of her students are being neglected in the area of creativity. With a small amount of attention, the gifted child may be reached early enough to develop into his fullest potential. The teacher also needs to realize how far above average the bright child is compared to his classmates. Observation is a vital key that can be used by a teacher when it is suspected that a child may be gifted. Cumulative records, test results, marks, and other teachers can also be used in helping the teacher discover the children in her class.

I feel that it would benefit many teachers if they would sit down at the end of a school year and discuss the children with the future teachers. So many times, important characteristics do not ever get printed in the child's cumulative records. This would help the next teacher to be "ready" for a child and to help his main strengths and weaknesses. It helps the teacher to really know and understand the child upon his first day at school, in many instances.

Parents can help or hinder the gifted child in a vast number of ways. So many adults feel that a child should not inquire past the knowledge of the parents. They have a tendency to feel "threatened" by the child who keeps inquiring about common subjects to a greater depth. Parents do not want their child to be different

or peculiar. This does not bother a young child, but later in life he, too, will want to identify with his peer group.

Following this page is an example of how a creative child may differ from the average classroom student.

A study was taken which encouraged two different second grade groups to tell ways in which a fire truck could be improved.

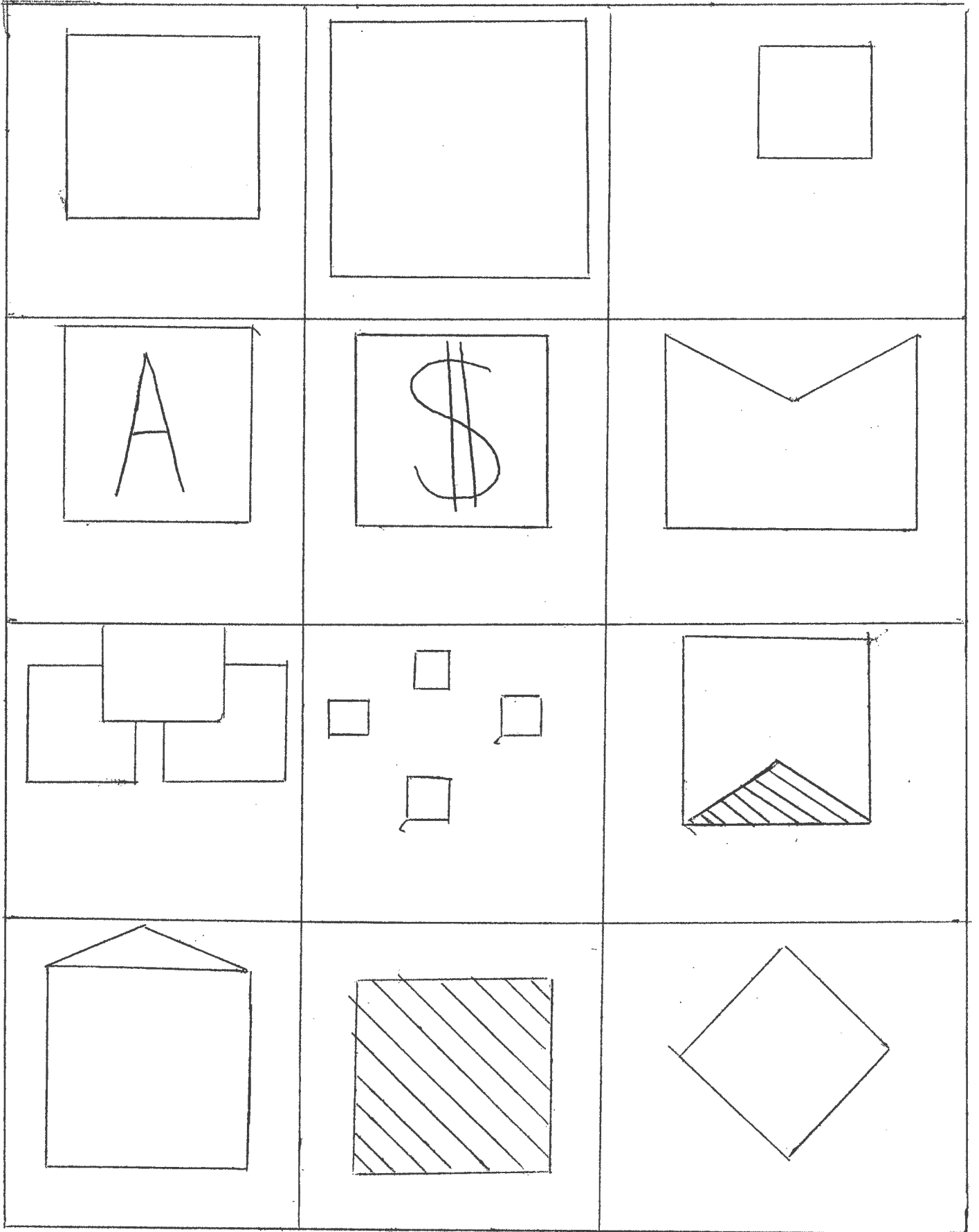
One group was shown the following pictures of how a square could be changed. This helped to stimulate the responses for improving the fire truck. The students began to add, subtract, substitute, and re-position the fire truck.

The next step was to compare this group with another to see if motivation played a part in motivation. The results showed that the students who were given the squares, were more aware of thinking and creating than the group which had not been stimulated.

This idea could be used in a classroom of today in order to better motivate the average and gifted child.

The square was changed by the following methods:

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. make larger | 5. subtract, multiply, divide |
| 2. make smaller | 6. substitute |
| 3. add something | 7. combine |
| 4. add other things | 8. change color and position |



CASE STUDY

I have been very interested in a little girl named Michelle. She is five years old and has entered kindergarden with much eagerness.

While doing this project about gifted children, I felt that this child had a great potential toward giftedness. Her abilities seemed to far surpass the norm.

During one visit that I made at their home I noticed something very outstanding in this little girl. Her father was a butcher and volunteered his assistance when I needed some meat packaged. During the time of cutting up the meat, and assembly for wrapping and labeling began to develop.

At this time, Michelle was four years old. She began to copy letters from the other labeled packages. The first packages had strangely shaped letters, but as time went on, she developed a very nice handwriting ability. We gave her a few hints along the way, but within an hour, Michelle could spell steak, stew meat, and hamburger.

As you can guess, everyone was very much surprised. This child was just so very energetic about learning how to spell before entering school.

Her mother told me about an incident that happened just recently. During the past three months, Michelle has been in kindergarden. It is here that she has learned to use the tool of phonics. She asked her mother how to spell the word "Crest"; finally, Michelle decided that phonics could be used to achieve the correct spelling. Later, she showed her mother the word and proceeded to say, " I knew that it started with a cr sound and had and e with st at the end."

I find this child very smart for her age. She excels in all of her subjects and does not seem to be socially apart from the group. The classmates look up to her as a leader and helper.

The teacher has begun to start Michelle into the more advanced puzzles because the class is going slower than she is in her daily assignments.

The following pictures are examples of her drawings of which she does constantly. Michelle loves to read and has already wanted to learn cursive writing.

Drawing Number 1 shows many detailed objects for a five year old child. This drawing took place during the first month of kindergarden. The figure does not contain as many detailed features as Drawings No. 2 and 3:

Michelle is very proud of the work that she does and is always eager to give someone a picture that usually describes an event in her life.

Drawing Number 1.



Drawing Number 2 and 3 (underneath)



Many times important facts can be overlooked. I could have missed some interesting things and details that were drawn by Michelle if it had not been for her persistence in explaining the work done.

Michelle gave me much insight into Drawing No. 2 by telling me that the girl was holding the letter "C" and the numeral 5. Then, she proceeded to show me the numeral 7 on the girl's head. She has seven feathers drawn in order to explain how many objects make up the number 7.

Drawing Number 3 is very similar to the other pictures. It is good to notice the fingers and toes on the girl.

This child has the potential and eagerness for knowledge. With the assistance and guidance of parents and teachers, this child can develop to a greater person in the area of education.

Thus far, Michelle has been encouraged very much by her parents. They realize that their daughter is very smart. But, they also realize that their child is a little girl who needs to have the experiences that children have in order to develop into a healthy person.

During one evening Michelle kept asking me to play a game of checkers. I thought that a five year old child was just not capable of playing the game to such a degree of concentration that many adults use. This child greatly amazed me! She did not move one checker until enough thought had been considered. The child knew all of the rules and had not actually played the game to any great degree. Of course, Michelle won the game.

Assistance in guiding and motivating a child such as this in future years to come would be a great challenge. I would like to mention a few of the many activities that could be used to help the gifted child:

1. Creative writing
2. Creative music and rhythms.
3. Original plays and dramatizations.
4. Murals and individual paintings, drawings, and cartoons.
5. Science experiments and demonstrations.
6. Construction of models.
7. Oral and written reports.
8. Free time in which to explore, choose activities, experiment.
9. Reading choices; interpretation of and reaction to content.

10. Planning for an excursion or an interview with a visitor.
11. Summarizing conclusions after an excursion or interview.
12. Committee work.
13. Collecting information and organizing it for use.
14. Participation on the playground, in clubs, in student projects. ⁵

Other methods that can be used to stimulate the child which are more specific are as follows:

1. Ask-and-Guess: (1) to think of questions concerning the behavior shown in a picture of Tom the Piper's Son stealing a pig, (2) to list possible causes, and (3) to list possible consequences.
2. Improvements: Think of the most interesting and unusual ways you can improve the toy dog (displayed) so that it would be more fun for a child to play with it.
3. Unusual Uses: Using the same toy dog, think of interesting and unusual uses for it other than as a toy.
4. Uses of Common Objects: Think of interesting and unusual uses of tin cans, for example. ⁵

5.

Conclusion

I could not have fully understood the importance of reaching and understanding the gifted child if it had not been for this project.

This paper has helped me to look for opportunities in my own classroom in which to use motivation for the gifted.

I would hope that this honors project might help some parent or teacher in the future to reach the child who is creative.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Torrance, Paul E. Education and the Creative Potential
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- 2 Cutts and Moseley. Teaching the Bright and Gifted.
Prentice Hall, Inc. Englewood, Cliffs 1957. p.18
- 3 Caswell, Hollis. The Gifted Child In the Regular Class-
room. Bureau of Publications, Columbia Un. N.Y.1953
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- 4 Torrance, Paul E. Education and the Creative Potential
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- 5 Caswell, Hollis. The Gifted Child In the Regular Class-
room. Bureau of Publications, Columbia Un. N.Y.1953
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