

Great Brains or Madness?

An Analysis of the Theme Issue

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Robinson, Ross and White (1985) identified a sequence of questions students can use to guide their learning about almost anything. Students from grade 6 through secondary school will raise them when asked to inquire about any object or topic. The sequence also arises when the same students are asked to suggest a logical order in which to conduct inquiry. Robinson et al. called their sequence of questions a "topic elaboration scheme." The questions are starting points in a natural scheme for elaborating a topic.

Elsewhere Robinson has suggested that the topic elaboration scheme is a framework retrievable from almost any piece of literate expository writing (1986). A grade 6 student's questions about an unidentified seedling are similar in form to the questions we raise and answer in a thesis, a paper, or indeed in a theme issue of a journal.

To begin to elaborate a topic we ask "what is it?" We seek to identify, to define, to name. This leads to our answering the general question, "what are its parts?" or "how does it work?" This question leads us to build a model for our concepts. So we carry our definitions a little further. We seek relationships with other concepts. We limit the concept by incorporating into our definitions an account of what it is not.

Having defined our terms and built a model of the constructs, in true academic fashion most of us will go on to answer the question "how has the topic of concern developed or changed?" We review the literature or examine various phases of development in answer to the questions "how has it changed over time?" or "what is it like in various places?" We develop understanding by looking at these changes or differences to answer the general question, "with what are the changes we observe correlated?"

Having explored the concept we are ready to generate hypotheses and to inquire "what would happen if . . . ?" We may begin empirical investigations, or imaginative interventions, or imaginary interventions. At this point we are embarking on a causal inquiry.

Finally we reach the inquiry that starts all practical change. Having completed to our satisfaction deliberations about the nature, development, and correlates of change, and empirical investigations, we may embark on

decisions. On the basis of our sequence of inquiries we ask “what should be done about . . . ?”

In devoting a theme issue of the *Canadian Journal of Education* to the education of gifted persons, we worked on the intuitive belief that our Canadian topic elaborations had been incomplete so far. It would have been arrogant to assert this on the basis of a cursory examination of the education of gifted persons in one or two provinces. The mere assembling of a series of papers on the education of gifted persons will not solve any problems. But our collaborative efforts to tell what we know in various perspectives may suggest directions for development and research and offer a better basis for deciding “what should be done about the education of gifted persons in Canada in the 1990s?”

We begin then with Robert Hoge’s paper “An Examination of the Giftedness Construct.” Although many authors have entered the debate about identification, assessment, and competing definitions, Hoge guides us through the mazes to develop and build a new model for the construct. Our authors then discuss the education system in its light. Each comes from among the associations that comprise the Canadian Society for the Study of Education—Foundations, Educational Administration, Curriculum and Special Education, Educational Psychology, and Teacher Education. They map how each segment of the Canadian educational system approaches the question, “what should be done about educating the gifted?”

Léonard Goguen, well known for his work on the state of the art of special education across Canada, recently completed a study of legislation on the education of gifted persons. He sets the scene for subsequent discussions by reviewing the historical and geographical context. Carol Crealock considers how far legislated change is carried into practice, asking how implementation is influenced by the attitudes of local clients, both among the general public and among school administrators. Colin Laine and Stanley Blank describe competing administrative models for programs for gifted learners. The Canadian perspective is maintained by Floyd Robinson and Tom Puk’s discussion of planned curriculum change. They raise issues basic to any discussion of how we should train teachers through preservice and inservice education.

Bruce Shore and Cindy Kaizer take up this theme with reflections on the training of teachers for gifted pupils. For teachers already in our school systems Julie Ellis and Erick Mokosch describe the university provision of leadership for the education of gifted and talented children.

The question “what happens if . . . ?” has many possible endings. Julie Ellis asks “what happens if our education programs for gifted children are idiosyncratic as many are?” She suggests how to evaluate idiosyncratic programs. Carolyn Yewchuk and Mary Ann Bibby ask “what happens if our gifted

students also happen to be handicapped? What should be done to ensure their needs are met?"

In the initial conception of this theme issue it seemed sufficient to solicit articles that would describe our triumphs and progress. Perhaps some would express some academic dissatisfaction with the status quo, possibly criticising our actions against some ideal.

Then a secondary school graduate of programs for the gifted asked, "what are you working on?" On hearing the reply, a theme issue of the *Canadian Journal of Education* on the education of gifted persons, he said, "that'll be a short issue." Two students were first offered the opportunity to respond to the whole series of articles. As students trained in inquiry are wont, Piers Nash and Laura Davison refused to write a literature review. They wanted empirical evidence. We proposed they find out and tell us what secondary school students experience in their school programs. After some negotiation about the use of available data from questionnaires on the editor's desk, and a request for 100 sheets of photocopying, we agreed. They talked with students from across Canada, all of whom had achieved Renzulli's "activity in the real world of the intellect" (1976). The result is an account of the education of gifted persons in Canada in the words of students. They tell us how various education systems across the country have helped students to complete independent science projects of some complexity. We hear how well gifted science students think school programs in various subjects promote the development of independent research skills.

Each article suggests directions for future research. Perhaps the compilation in a single volume will enable us to see broader directions for our future efforts. None of the authors has had a chance to juxtapose the various pieces of the picture. The reader has this opportunity. Each of us may want to ask how far the clarity of Hoge's construct of giftedness permeates the discussions. We may go on to ask to what extent the protections described by Goguen might allay the fears expressed by Laine and Blank or by Yewchuk and Bibby. Will Shore and Kaizer's training of teachers be a basis for Robinson and Puk's planned changes? Would the leadership proposed by Ellis and Mokosch complement Shore and Kaizer's training of teachers? Could Robinson and Puk's curriculum model be a stimulus for teacher training leadership or work with the handicapped? Does the administration of programs of education for the gifted require curriculum analysis as a first step?

A theme journal can be an account of the state of the art. It can be a series of suggestions for future directions. It can be merely a random collection of loosely connected articles. This theme issue was intended to purvey our best. Through it we hoped to convey our aspirations for the future, to offer a starting point for collaboration among authors and their colleagues. Could

we learn from each other and better contribute to educating our gifted students? Perhaps then our gifted students would be able to tell a different story. This guest editor would rather not answer the question, "what should be done about . . . ?" without taking into account the contribution of each of our distinguished authors. We should instead answer it jointly, working together and above all listening to the students we claim to value. We could then hope to earn the title, "gifted educators," rather than "educators of the gifted."

REFERENCES

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