

Letters

A SCHEMING, HIDDEN TAX?

In suggesting that an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) is a scheme to impose a hidden tax on the working poor (April 1984), Alex Molnar insults our intelligence. I contend that the IRAs have generated an increase in private capital that has produced jobs and created more sales and property taxes, which have been fed back into public education at a rate to keep school divisions ahead of inflation for the first time in decades.

Privatization is necessary to produce an economic base to keep governments and their services solvent, fluid, and productive.

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REPLACING ONE RESTRICTION WITH ANOTHER

Judy Eby's criteria (April 1984) for selecting elementary students for the Barrington, Illinois, gifted program—task commitment and creativity—are an attempt to break away from the abuse of test scores frequently used to identify gifted children. The mystique of the I.Q. score has contributed more than any other factor to the elimination of gifted students who might benefit from special programs, the underachiever and the culturally different. But Eby's recommendations do little to correct this abuse: by using task commitment as a necessary prerequisite for giftedness, she replaces one set of restrictive criteria with another.

Task commitment, a cluster of behaviors that includes persistence, drive, and concentration, is not necessarily characteristic of gifted elementary children. Perrone (1983), in studying thousands of elementary children over a 25 year period, found that "a myriad of personality, creativity, and sociometric measures revealed no clear distinctions between gifted and non-gifted populations in the early elementary grades." He concluded

that we need to differentiate between giftedness in childhood and after childhood since persistence and goal orientation may occur after the ages of ten and eleven, not in the early elementary grades. Dunn and Dunn (1974) found that persistence ranked fifth in the ability to discriminate between gifted and non-gifted elementary students. Eby's selection of task commitment in her pre-task evaluation may thus eliminate children with potential who cannot persevere or who lack the ability to concentrate long enough to complete a project.

In addition, the pre-task assessment activities she described stress the convergent, not the divergent, responses one would expect when attempting to identify creative students. The behaviors that distinguish the gifted elementary students from their age mates are neither personality traits nor their ability to complete sophisticated products, but their ability to use cognitive processes optimally and uniquely. Intellectually and creatively gifted elementary children possess ability to process ideas and to perceive their environment in unusual ways. These are the behaviors that should be identified when selecting children for gifted programs.

Dunn and Dunn quoted in Franks and Dolan. "Affective Characteristics of Gifted Children: Educational Implications." *Gifted Child Quarterly* (Fall 1982).

Perrone, P. "Issues in Social and Emotional Development." *Roeper Review* 6 (November 1983).

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ENCOURAGE THE NONPRODUCTIVE GIFTED

It would be ideal if all students exhibited productive "teacher expected" behavior. They don't. The history of creative and successful people is a history of societal resistance that is unfortunately most evident in teaching. Notice the essential requirements

of identification by Eby in order of importance 1) promptness, 2) accuracy, 3) detail; that is, *conformity*. How would Einstein, Edison, Steinmetz, and Mozart have fared in this limited approach program?

Eby says that "the behavior model" (and she should have credited Renzulli) avoids labeling children. Why is it that the label of "gifted/talented" is bad and "teacher" or "sophomore" or "first team" is not? It is the biased response to the label of "gifted" shown in her article that needs modification—not the label. Nowhere have I seen research that even hints that identification as "gifted" is negative to the child.

Eby refers to vague and mysterious test scores. Does that suggest her own scholarship? The Stanford-Binet has been around and substantiated for about 60 years; though not the only nor necessarily the best identifier, it is highly correlated with success in school. If we look at a nonproductive 140 I.Q. child, the fault is the school's for failing to reach the child, not the child's for having scored well on the test. Students who show the potential for exceptional ability, no matter on what instrument, should be encouraged to produce.

We need all the "gifted" we can find. We need to encourage the nonproductive as well as the productive. Most of all we need to recognize that a gift to one of us is a gift to all of us, and any gift not opened is a loss to us all.

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JUDY EBY REPLIES

This gifted behavior model does not attempt to identify "gifted children" of any culture or achievement level. Identification is made solely on the basis of demonstrated ability and is available to all children. The program's primary goal is to motivate children to strengthen the behaviors associated with task commitment and

creativity, not to eliminate anybody. The Gifted Behavior Learning Experiences motivate children to challenge themselves to become inventors or scientists or explorers or authors.

Motivation is what this approach is all about. Children with a wide range of abilities, cultural backgrounds, and achievement patterns become excited about concepts and theories not offered in the regular school curriculum. Undiscovered talents emerge from the recalcitrant child who was never before asked to create his or her own invention for school, as well as from the most highly able children who have just skimmed the surface of their abilities in the regular curriculum.

As most educational programs are continually evolving, so my own program has become more oriented to divergent production. During the 1983-84 school year, the four pre-tasks used were the invention described in the April article, an original play for a playwriting unit, a proposal for independent study for a unit on applying the scientific method to research, and the construction of a self-supporting bridge for a problem-solving unit in architecture. An activity with an end

product does not preclude divergent behavior. And when I present the information for each unit to the children, I encourage them to be as creative as possible.

My program does not meet the needs of every child every day. But it is an honest attempt to develop the talents of the widest possible range of children in the school community and to provide a model of positive achievement for all.

JUDY EBY

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Editor's Note

"The Kind of Schools We Need," by Elliot Eisner (October 1983), originally appeared in the *Claremont Reading Conference, 46th Yearbook (1982)*, published by the Center for Developmental Studies in Education, Claremont Graduate School, edited by Malcolm P. Douglass.

Thinking Skills Network Planned

As suggested at a conference held in May at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, ASCD is sponsoring a network of individuals and institutions interested in the teaching of thinking. John Barell, Montclair State College, New Jersey, who attended the conference, has offered to help start the network. Barell plans to develop a directory of local programs and resource people, and to gather information about characteristics of successful programs. The network will probably have a newsletter, for which a small fee may be charged.

Interested persons may write to:
Dr. John Barell, Associate Professor
Montclair State College
Upper Montclair, NJ 07043.

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