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## REVIEW OF PROGRAM OPTIONS FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED IN THE VISUAL ARTS

*Mark Jones*

### Introduction

Gifted students are an inestimable natural resource, and indeed should be viewed as a national treasure. A consequential number of America's future pace-setting contributors in science, medicine, literature, the performing and visual arts, athletics, technology, and politics will emerge from this group of students. The inexcusable reality is that their situation is far from one of high esteem. Our nation's educational systems have only recently begun answering the challenge of providing an appropriate educational program to meet the distinguishably different needs of gifted students. What is even more shocking is that our educational systems discriminate against certain subgroups of the gifted population by offering appropriate programs almost exclusively in the academic areas.

Clark and Zimmerman (1984) discuss the need for significantly different instruction for those gifted in the visual arts. They equate the instructional needs of the gifted in the visual arts as being no different in quality than the instructional needs of the academically gifted. Gifted programming must not offer only quantitative increases in the regular curriculum, such as three math sheets instead of one. The programming for the gifted, instead, must be significantly different in order to meet the needs of gifted students and challenge them to meet their potential (Madeja, 1983).

Hurlwitz (1984) and Clark and Zimmerman (1984) state that artistically talented or gifted students should be exposed to four roles of the professions in the visual arts: aestheticians, art critics, art historians, and art producers. Objectives for these

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students should be scoped and sequenced like any other subject area to maximize learning outcomes. The content of the program should focus on important skills, processes, and knowledge in the world of art.

With the avalanche of educational health reports in the past few years, this country has seen a renewed interest in the quality of the education of the young. Among the results of this new public interest is the improvement of educational opportunities for our gifted and talented. Unfortunately, many programs have been thrown together at the last minute to take advantage of financial reimbursement from state and federal agencies (Chetelat, 1981).

The neglect for the gifted in the visual arts is not the sole fault of administrators (Margolis, 1978). It is far too common for gifted students to be directed toward the sciences and other academics and steered away from the arts. This is frequently the attitude that many parents and guidance counselors take with the gifted student.

### **Definitions**

Many of the country's State Boards of Education have adopted, at least in some form, the definition adopted in 1978 when President Carter signed The Gifted and Talented Children's Act. The heart of this bill, Public Law 95-561, is Section 902 which reads as follows:

Gifted and talented children are those who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance.

These are children who require differentiated education programs and services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and or potential ability in any of the following:

1. General intellectual ability
2. Specific academic aptitude

3. Creative or productive thinking
4. Leadership ability
5. Visual and performing arts
6. Psychomotor ability (Whitmore, 1980, p. 12)

The majority of the programs found in a search of the literature were for the gifted and talented academically, many of which began in the elementary grades. If it is important to begin at this level for those who are academically gifted in order to help them reach their potential, then it should be equally important to do the same for the gifted in the visual arts. Anderson (1959) stated:

Professional proficiency in the arts demands concentrated study from a relatively young age. Studies in the arts should be initiated in the elementary schools and certainly no later than high school to be effective. Exceptionally talented children must be identified and encouraged. (p. 82)

It was interesting to note some programs for the gifted and talented in the visual arts got their start as a side program for the academically gifted.

Giftedness is most often determined by tests which measure I.Q. and achievement. These numerical scores are then used in a rank form to indicate giftedness. What I.Q. score signified gifted or nongifted varied anywhere from a 115 I.Q. in some states to a 120 I.Q. in Pennsylvania and a 140 I.Q. in California (Delisle, Reis, and Gubbins, 1981; Reynolds and Birch, 1976). Within these scores some authors made distinctions between levels of giftedness. Witty (1967) suggested three separate levels of giftedness:

1. The academically talented: 15-20% of the population having an I.Q. score above 116
2. The gifted: 2-4% of the population having an I.Q. score above 132
3. The highly gifted: .1% of the population having an

According to Cartwright, Cartwright and Ward (1981) "talented" referred to a specific skill or achievement, while gifted seemed to encompass a broader range of exceptionalities. It was apparent that there were almost as many definitions as there were authors on the subject. Some authors made distinctions between the two words, some made distinctions between scores, while still others made little or no distinction between the two words at all.

Today, most educators realize that I.Q. test scores do not measure all aspects of intelligence and are not the absolute they were once thought to be (Guilford, 1967). Gardner (1984) speculates the theory of multiple intelligences, few of which, he believed, could be tested by a standardized test.

### **Selection Processes**

The selection procedures used for gifted and talented programs in the visual arts seemed to be almost as varied as those used for similar programs for the academically gifted. Some of the programs used a standardized test score within the selection process, putting varied amounts of value to those scores. Perhaps these scores were needed to meet a criterion for funding under a state guideline. Some of the most common selection procedures were as follows:

1. Nomination by school faculty or administration
2. Parent nomination
3. Self nomination
4. Portfolio review
5. Timed assignments
6. Interview
7. Standardized test scores

Lists of observable characteristics have been developed to help the classroom teacher determine whether or not a student is gifted or talented in the visual arts. Lowenfeld (1964) listed five major

factors distinguishing the gifted from the average art student:

1. Fluency of imagination and expression. The freedom with which the child adapted his/her ability to a diverse situation.
2. A highly developed sensibility for spatial distribution and organization, often emphasizing rhythm and action.
3. An intuitive quality of imagination. The ability to bring into existence constellations or events that have not existed before.
4. Directness of expression which manifested itself when an experience was in tune with the child's desire to express it visually.
5. A high degree of self-identification with the subject matter and medium—intense feeling for the medium.

Horovitz, Lewis and Luca (1967) offered another list that was somewhat longer, but similar. They have broken the before mentioned list into more specific areas which might be easier for the classroom teacher to deal with or to use a checklist:

1. Talented children's drawings show greater variety within the range of subject choices, especially at the true-to- appearance level.
2. They have a larger graphic vocabulary.
3. Accelerated development is one of the most pervading characteristics of the talented student. This development is beyond their age group.
4. The talented child has an extraordinary imagination.
5. Gifted children are more adept than the average in representing movement.
6. Talented children surpass average children in the conscious and deliberate grouping of objects and people.

7. They are better able to achieve color subtleties, contrasts, and integration of color.
8. Talented children are more aware of the possibilities and limits of media.
9. They are willing to explore new materials.
10. The gifted are more willing and able to extend their interest to subjects that are challenging and provocative.
11. The total perception of the talented child is more visually oriented and discriminating.
12. In talented children there is an effective interplay between selective visual observation and visual memory.
13. Unlike the average child who likes to be left alone when picturing, the gifted asks for explanations and instruction.
14. They are more responsive to unusual subjects in art than others of their age and are more stimulated and influenced by such work.
15. The gifted child shows unusual development in several ways, rather than one. He may combine excellence in form, grouping, movement, and use of color.
16. Gifted children show greater interest in the aesthetic qualities of art works, such as design, color and technique.

### **Types of Programs**

Some of the types of programs for the gifted and talented visual arts student tend to fit somewhere in the partial list provided by Getzel and Dillon (1975) which includes:

1. Summer institutes
2. Special classes in a particular subject matter

3. Saturday seminars
4. Ability grouping
5. Enrichment programs
6. Special schools for gifted students only
7. Individual tutoring
8. Honors programs
9. Activities offered by non-school institutions

Even though the programs found by this researcher were numerous and quite varied in their selection processes, the limitations of service all could be classified into one of the above or following categories.

#### **After School or Saturday Program**

This type of program, which would be considered a form of an enrichment program, seems to be becoming one of the more popular types sponsored by the public schools. By offering a program for the gifted and talented in the visual arts after school or on Saturdays, the students are not pulled out of regular classes. This also helps ensure that the student has a genuine interest in the program. These programs also provide longer time periods for the students to work uninterrupted.

#### **Artists in the Schools Program**

In 1971 Gowen and Torrance predicted that this type of program would see an increase in popularity over the next few years. This apparently did not prove to be the case because this researcher found evidence of only one such program in existence in the current literature. Putting a professional in the schools was not really a new idea; this had been done for many years in vocational and technical schools. Students are given contact with a professional artist as a teacher or a guest demonstrator, which may give the class more relevancy or credence in the students' eyes. One major problem with this program, according to Yeatts (1980), was that of obtaining



requirements and stipulations set by state certification agencies.

### **Mentorships**

Mentorships are probably one of the oldest forms of teaching, having been used throughout history in the guilds with apprentices, journeyman, and master levels. Today they can be implemented by taking stock of the local communities' resources and asking if any of them would be interested in taking a student under their wings. The student taking part in such a program many times was able to see, if not experience, all of the processes from start to finish. Sometimes seeing the practicality or the purpose of each segment makes the whole much more meaningful.

### **Partnerships**

In the opinion of this researcher, this was the most original program found in the current literature, mainly because of its use of college art students. After completing a series of workshops, college art students visited the school as visiting artists. Each college student was assigned a small group of children, thus enabling a more personal relationship to develop. Szekely (1981) stated that the college art student could help the artistically gifted child to avoid or deal with some common problems faced by many young artists, such as peer and parental pressures. The developed pairs were encouraged to do more than produce art work together. Such things as visiting galleries and museums, talking about art or just going on a sketching trip together were suggested. The college student's role was not to be strictly that of a teacher but rather that of a role model. Importance was placed on instilling personal motivation, goal setting, learning to use new media, and exploring new forms or styles. The importance of growth was to be demonstrated as well. Children could learn that sometimes art was frustrating and at other times it could be exciting, but both were sometimes a natural part of the creative

process.

### **Museum Programs**

Many museums, along with their display of art and artifacts, also provided art studio programs for individuals. These programs were a blessing for the artistically gifted student whose school offered no special program to meet his/her needs. Some museums even had their own schools, with classes offered in the evenings as well as during the day and weekends. These classes could be well suited for gifted students because of the higher level instruction paired with the low pressure of a non-graded system.

### **Enrichment Programs**

Enrichment programs are by far the most common type of program being offered by the public schools today. In these programs gifted and talented students were taken from the regular classroom during the school day and sent to a resource room somewhere within the system. The amount of time spent in the resource room varied with each program; but the most common amount of time per week seemed to be one hour. Students in this type of program were frequently allowed to work on individual projects and the teacher in this program acted more as a resource as opposed to actually teaching preplanned lessons.

According to Griggs (1984), programs which stressed independent study, discussions, peer teaching and little if any lecturing were much more conducive to gifted and talented learning style preferences.

### **Magnet Programs**

Magnet schools were usually found in larger metropolitan school districts such as New York and Chicago. In these schools gifted and talented students were grouped together according to giftedness or interests. The competition in these schools was sometimes greater because the performance level of the students was more equal. These

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schools usually had very limited enrollment which also increased the pressure of acceptance as well as staying in such a school. The students took both the regular academics as well as courses in their fields of speciality and support areas for about half of the school day.

### **Revolving Door Programs**

This type of program places gifted and average students in a resource room for a specific reason, assignment, or project. When the student completed the reason or purpose for attending the resource room, the student returned to the regular classroom. Some students stayed longer than others and made more frequent use of the room than their counterparts.

One advantage of this program is its accessibility to all students in the school, not just the gifted and talented. Thus, it serves a larger number of students which in turn makes it attractive to school administrators. Although there was no mention of an art program set up in this manner, there was mention of art projects being done within the program. This would be an easy program to build upon with, perhaps, the major expense for such a program in the visual arts being for equipment to do higher level projects. The art teacher could become a resource room teacher for one or two periods a day and eventually this could become a full-time resource room for the visual arts.

### **Summer Programs**

Programs offered during the summer at the national and state level, as well as programs offered by colleges, universities, and institutes, fall into both the enrichment and the magnet school categories. Here gifted and talented students are brought together as a select group for a brief but intense study period. These programs are usually so select that they only serve about one in thirty

applicants. Because of the limited capacity, only a few gifted and talented visual art students are served.

### Summary

Part of the reason that there are not as many programs nationally is that the art teachers are not advocating the need for programs for the gifted and talented in the visual arts. The art teachers are under the assumption that they are adequately meeting the needs of the "special" students. The question the art teachers must ask themselves is whether they are offering contentment or growth for the gifted and talented.

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