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Is the 'Gifted' Child a Social Isolate?

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The six grades of an elementary school presented an opportunity to test this hypothesis. Cooperation of the faculty and administration allowed us to examine the possibility that "gifted" children become more isolated from their classmates the further they continue in school.

Three questions were pre-tested and then asked of one class of first graders, one of second, and two classes each of third through sixth graders in the same school.

"Which three children in your room do the best schoolwork?"

"Which three children in your room do you do things with most often?"

"If you could sit near any three children you want to, whom would you choose?"

The questions were asked orally of the first and second graders, the examiner recording on different colored sheets of paper so as to make the children feel that the questions were unrelated. From the third through the sixth grades, children received one questionnaire at a time, each of different color, and each of which listed the names of all classmates.

Results from the Iowa Basic Skills Test were used as the measure of "giftedness" for children in the third through the sixth grades. Teachers' estimates were used for the first two grades. The five most gifted and the five least gifted in each class (of nearly thirty children each) form our extreme cases.

The second and third questions seemed to test the same phenomenon, and so they were combined as one measure of social distance. Separate graphs were plotted for each class and each grade. No developmental differences appeared. In the first as in the sixth grade, the most gifted children were among the best liked and the least gifted among the least liked.

In all, 294 children were studied. Children with three or less choices

by their classmates may be considered as unpopular. Of the 206 children in this category, twice as many are among the least gifted than among the most gifted (44 to 20). Seventy-six children are moderately popular (4 to 7 choices). Twenty-two are among the most gifted in this group of average popularity, and only four among the least gifted. Only twelve children were selected eight or more times. Eight of these most popular pupils were also most gifted, and none were among the least gifted.

When the best schoolwork question is tabulated, the results lean more heavily toward the most gifted. For instance, 238 pupils are chosen four times or less, 47 of them are among the least gifted and 16 among the most gifted (3 to 1). Of the 56 children chosen five or more times as doing the best schoolwork, 34 are among the most gifted, and only one among the least gifted.

Is the *gifted* child the social isolate?

Not within these six grades of an urban school. If such isolation does occur, it may begin at a later stage. Perhaps as important a consideration is that one third of the gifted children do not demonstrate their abilities in the classroom such that their fellow pupils notice them. Can this be the beginning of "underachievement?"

But what about the least gifted children—children "exceptional" in the negative direction? They *do* seem to be left out of it, even as early as the first grades.

In our current prosperity, with the rising school enrollments, and the demand for greater quality and quantity of minds, it may be natural to sympathize with the gifted child. We may see in him the greatest potential for our nation's future. And we have serious cause to worry if as many as one out of three such children fails to invest the talents for education with which he was born. But we dare not forget the talents which may still lie within the less gifted or even the least gifted child. There is the challenge to teach him, to encourage him, to counsel him so that he may find his optimal happiness in adult life. Both he and his more gifted classmate need the skills of a teacher to realize the potential which is theirs. In our current prosperity we may forsake teaching for selection, coaching for recruitment, and yet this study of six elementary grades in one school indicates how great a job is still to be done.