

Bright Children

A. By the time Laszlo Polgar's first baby was born in 1969 he already had firm views on child-rearing. An eccentric citizen of communist Hungary, he had written a book called "Bring up Genius!" and one of his favourite sayings was "Geniuses are made, not born". An expert on the theory of chess, he proceeded to teach little Zsuzsa at home, spending up to ten hours a day on the game. Two more daughters were similarly hot-housed. All three obliged their father by becoming world-class players. The youngest, Judit, is currently ranked 13th in the world, and is by far the best female chess player of all time. Would the experiment have succeeded with a different trio of children? If any child can be turned into a star, then a lot of time and money are being wasted worldwide on trying to pick winners.

B. America has long held "talent searches", using test results and teacher recommendations to select children for advanced school courses, summer schools and other extra tuition. This provision is set to grow. In his state-of-the-union address in 2006, President George Bush announced the "American Competitiveness Initiative", which, among much else, would train 70,000 high-school teachers to lead advanced courses for selected pupils in mathematics and science. Just as the superpowers' space race made Congress put money into science education, the thought of China and India turning out hundreds of thousands of engineers and scientists is scaring America into prodding its brightest to do their best.

C. The philosophy behind this talent search is that ability is innate; that it can be diagnosed with considerable accuracy; and that it is worth cultivating. In America, bright children are ranked as "moderately", "highly", "exceptionally" and "profoundly" gifted. The only chance to influence innate ability is thought to be in the womb or the first couple of years of life. Hence the fad for "teaching

aids” such as videos and flashcards for newborns, and “whale sounds” on tape which a pregnant mother can strap to her belly.

D. In Britain, there is a broadly similar belief in the existence of innate talent, but also an egalitarian sentiment which makes people queasy about the idea of investing resources in grooming intelligence. Teachers are often opposed to separate provision for the best-performing children, saying any extra help should go to stragglers. In 2002, in a bid to help the able while leaving intact the ban on most selection by ability in state schools, the government set up the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth. This outfit runs summer schools and master classes for children nominated by their schools. To date, though, only seven in ten secondary schools have nominated even a single child. Last year all schools were told they must supply the names of their top 10%.

E. Picking winners is also the order of the day in ex-communist states, a hangover from the times when talented individuals were plucked from their homes and ruthlessly trained for the glory of the nation. But in many other countries, opposition to the idea of singling out talent and grooming it runs deep. In Scandinavia, a belief in virtues like modesty and social solidarity makes people flinch from the idea of treating brainy children differently.

F. And in Japan, there is a widespread belief that all children are born with the same innate abilities – and should, therefore, be treated alike. All are taught together, covering the same syllabus at the same rate until they finish compulsory schooling. Those who learn quickest are expected then to teach their classmates. In China, extra teaching is provided, but to a self-selected bunch. “Children’s palaces” in big cities offer a huge range of after-school classes. Anyone can sign up; all that is asked is excellent attendance.

G. Statistics give little clue as to which system is best. The performance of the most able is heavily affected by factors other than state provision. Most state

education in Britain is nominally non-selective, but middle-class parents try to live near the best schools. Ambitious Japanese parents have made private, out-of-school tuition a thriving business. And Scandinavia's egalitarianism might work less well in places with more diverse populations and less competent teachers. For what it's worth, the data suggest that some countries – like Japan and Finland, see table – can eschew selection and still thrive. But that does not mean that any country can ditch selection and do as well.

H. Mr Polgar thought any child could be a prodigy given the right teaching, an early start and enough practice. At one point he planned to prove it by adopting three baby boys from a poor country and trying his methods on them. (His wife vetoed the scheme.) Some say the key to success is simply hard graft. Judit, the youngest of the Polgar sisters, was the most driven, and the most successful; Zsofia, the middle one, was regarded as the most talented, but she was the only one who did not achieve the status of grandmaster. "Everything came easiest to her," said her older sister. "But she was lazy."

Questions 29-34

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage?

In boxes 29-34 on your answer sheet, write

YES if the statement agrees with the view of the writer.

NO if the statement contradicts the view of the writer.

NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

29. America has a long history of selecting talented students into different categories.

30. Teachers and schools in Britain held welcome attitude towards the government's selection of gifted students.

31. Some parents agree to move near reputable schools in Britain.

32. Middle-class parents participate in their children's education.

33. Japan and Finland comply with selected student's policy.

34. Avoiding-selection-policy only works in a specific environment.

Questions 35-36

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D.

Write your answers in boxes 35-36 on your answer sheet.

35. What's Laszlo Polgar's point of view towards geniuses of children

- A) Chess is the best way to train geniuses.
- B) Genius tends to happen on first child.
- C) Geniuses can be educated later on.
- D) Geniuses are born naturally.

36. What is the purpose of citing Zsotia's example in the last paragraph

- A) Practice makes genius.
- B) Girls are not good at chess.
- C) She was an adopted child.
- D) Middle child is always the most talented.

Questions 37-41

Use the information in the passage to match the countries (*listed A-E*) with correct connection below.

Write the appropriate letters, A-E, in boxes 37-41 on your answer sheet.

37. Less gifted children get help from other classmates

38. Attending extra teaching is open to anyone

39. People are reluctant to favor gifted children due to social characteristics

40. Both views of innate and egalitarian co-existed

41. Craze of audio and video teaching for pregnant women.

- A. Scandinavia
- B. Japan
- C. Britain
- D. China
- E. America

ANSWER
29. YES
30. NO
31. YES
32. NOT GIVEN
33. NO
34. YES
35. C
36. A
37. B
38. D
39. A
40. C
41. E