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What About the Bicycle Riders?

Joseph S. Renzulli
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Nobody believes in action any more, so words have become a substitute, all the way up to the top, a substitute for the truth nobody wants to hear because they can't change it, or they'll lose their jobs if they change it, or maybe they simply don't know how to change it.
—John le Carré
The Russia House

Gifted Programs and the Larger Issues

A good deal of the controversy in this exchange of ideas between George and us is based on one's view of the fundamental sources of power that influence policy noising in the field of education. These sources affect the daily work of almost all educational professionals and the students they teach. The first source is "the research," and related issues such as (a) the quality and objectivity of studies used to support or attack particular views and practices, and (b) the role that research actually plays in informed decision making about what will or will not he used to guide educational practices. Because of differences of opinion about interpreting studies related to contested issues, the rule research has direct relevance to our exchange of ideas.

The second source of power for decision making is much more complex, subtle, intriguing, and, we might add, much more interesting to think about and discuss. It deals with personalities, politics, and power in the educational decision-malting process; and it is probably the reason why grouping, with its implications for gifted programs, has become the largest and single most controversial issue in American education. Almost all other major issues (e.g., busing, desegregation, voucher plans, state funding formulas, inclusion, class size) are related to this second source of decision making power, which we have chosen to call "the politics of school improvement." We believe that the debate over gifted programs is, in reality side show in the larger picture of the current school reform movement that is taking place in American education. We think it can be shown that current attacks on grouping and gifted programs are really a smoke screen to cover up for major failures on the parts of high level policy makers and even some of the reform movement leaders.

However, because of the nature of our task to respond to George's chapter and our different interpretations of research, we will concentrate on directly responding to his four propositions. First, we will briefly discuss the research. Following this discussion, we will present an alternative proposition for each of the four around which George developed his chapter, along with reasons for rejecting his propositions in favor of our own! We will conclude

by arguing for a balance of inductive and deductive approaches to instruction. Creating that balance requires general middle school educators to learn from gifted educators how to successfully infuse inductive strategies into the curriculum.

We want to say al the outset that we admire Georges enthusiasm for his position and his self-acknowledged characterization of his propositions as "broadsides being fired indiscriminately." This controversy would not be worth writing about or reading about if there were not passion on both sides of the issue. It is our hope that in this chapter we can contribute our enthusiasm for the positions which we take and perhaps even fire a few broadsides of our own.

The Research … Whose Side Is God on?

Research is supposed to be the jewel in the crown of the scientific method and the process by which we can validate good practice and transcend mere opinion when engaging it battles over different points of view. Like the beliefs of all the armies that ever took to the battlefield thinking God was on their side, persons attempting to argue a particular point of view also try to make the case that the research is on their side. There are, obviously, different perspectives about the quality and objectivity of any and all research studies. And if it appears that the research does not support a preferred point of view, a natural reaction is to question the quality and objectivity of a research study or to put a personal spin on it in order to support a predetermined position.

The world of educational research is, admittedly, a quagmire of conflicting claims and counter claims. It is probably for this reason that tradition and momentum rather than research account for the majority of classroom practices. Serious problems get trivialized or blown out of proportion by over-zealous theorists, overblown claims, overheated press coverage, and old fashioned stump orators seeking an issue for which they would like to become the champion. Unfortunately, the policy makers who control our very limited resources arc all too willing to make decisions based on whoever shouts the loudest; promises the quickest fix, especially in achievement test scores; or uses the most creative spin doctors! Oftentimes, the validity of information is dwarfed by the zealousness of advocates and the political need to respond quickly to a crisis, whether it be real or perceived. And because educational practitioners (especially teachers and building principals) are too often at the bottom end of the decision-making pipe line, they are often saddled with state policies and regulations based on passion and misinformation rather than scientific findings.

In our earlier chapter we presented research that supports our argument for a variety or differentiated learning opportunities, and we described a research-based model that has helped build bridges between the sides in the long-standing controversy of equity versus excellence. We stand behind the studies we cited, especially the ones relating to the dumbing down of textbooks and the mismatch between student ability and levels of instruction. But for reasons mentioned above, we will not revisit these studies, introduce any new studies as "surprise witnesses," or even attack the studies that George offers in evidence for his argument against special services for high achieving students. Persons on both sides of these controversies could go round-and-round, and back-and-forth on the research, and still make very little headway so far as the larger issues are concerned. We will, instead, offer some suggestions about another method of analysis

that you might use to reflect upon the issues to hopefully take steps in your school or classroom to do the things you think are in the best interests of *all* learners.

The Me-as-Researcher Method

If the experts can look at the same studies and come up with radically different conclusions, how are teachers, administrators, and policy makers supposed to do the things that result in the most appropriate and effective learning experiences for young people?

There is probably only one justifiable answer to this complex question. This answer relates to the ways in which we use our *own* beliefs and experiences to guide the decisions we make about organizing schools and serving young people in our classrooms. We will refer to this approach as the "me-as-researcher" method, and ask you to use your own judgment in determining if George's comments about "wild-eyed inaccuracies," "the lunatic fringe" and "poorly documented arguments" are accurate portrayals of the work of persons who disagree with him. In suggesting the me-as-researcher method we are not discounting the role that formal research should play in decision making. We world, however, encourage you to examine relevant studies in their original rather than summarized or digested Mums and to interpret the researchers' conclusions by blending your own experiences with file findings **before** deciding which propositions you support.

> ***George's Proposition One: There is no hard evidence to suggest that gifted and talented [GT] students cannot have virtually all of their reasonable academic needs met in the context of the regular classroom.***
>
> **Alternative Proposition One**
> **Hard evidence, common sense, and the experiences of classroom teachers and students clearly indicate that some, but not all, of the curricular differentiation necessary to challenge all students can be provided in regular classrooms.**

George's first proposition is approached in a curious way. Rather than commenting on *the* most direct "hard evidence" dealing with this topic (See for example, Archambault, Westberg, Brown, Hallmark, Emmons, & Zhang, 1992; Flanders, 1937; Reis et al., 1993; Taylor & Frye, 1988; Usiskin, 1987; Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, & Salvin, 1992), George chooses to discredit the motives of gifted education advocates. George's argument does not deal with the evidence about levels of challenge in the regular classroom. Rather, he devotes the vast majority of this section to the overall condition of education in America. He spins out a rosy scenario that is intended to prove that regular classrooms can take care of all individual differences and educational needs in all curricular areas and at all times between the opening and closing bells of the school day. It is our guess that most, if not all, professional educators would like to believe that such miracles can be accomplished. But if we take an honest look at today's schools and classrooms, what do we see? Growing diversity among students, larger class sizes, deteriorating buildings, reduced school budgets, changing family patterns, and the social and economic fallout from a rapidly changing society are being dumped on the doorstep of the schools. Teachers constantly describe to us their feelings of fatigue, anxiety, and guilt as they admit that they have

become convinced that they cannot and should not be expected to meet the needs of all of their students all of the time. Does George really think we can deal with this diversity by creating an omnibus one-size-fits-all classroom? It is this approach toward the homogenization of learning, rather than the conservative conspiracy that he describes, that will cause concerned parents to explore voucher programs, home schooling, charter schools, and other alternatives to public education.

That there are differences of opinion about the quality of our schools is not contested. We will attempt to frame the issue by briefly, and we hope objectively, describing these opposing points of view. Following a description of this disparity of opinion, we will offer what is a reasonable way for readers to access their own positions about the status of our schools and the essence of George's Proposition One, which asserts that gifted and talented students can have virtually all of their reasonable academic needs met in the regular classroom.

Gloom and Doom vs. the Rosy Scenario

One side of the issue about the condition of America's schools is represented by the almost ceaseless flow of gloom-and-doom reports which document the low level of quality that characterizes public education. Beginning with *The Nation at Risk* report (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a seemingly endless number of studies have described negative indicators of the quality of public education. These reports have focused on declining SAT scores, low standards and low state achievement test results, high dropout rates, the poor standing of American students on international comparisons, and the low literacy rates and job preparedness levels of high school graduates. Related studies report on the increased need for remedial courses at the college level, growing numbers of public school teachers who send their own children to private schools, and dramatic increases in the number of persons and groups seeking publicly funded alternatives to public schools. Even George negatively characterizes general education when he refers to gifted programs as "isolated islands in a sea of discouragement and denial." *Turning Points* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989), a report on education of adolescents by The Carnegie Corporation, which has become a cornerstone or the middle school movement, points out conditions that paint a gloom-and-doom picture:

> [T]he persuasiveness of intellectual underdevelopment strikes at the heart of our nation's future prosperity. American 13-year-olds, for example, are now on average far behind their counterparts in other industrialized nations in mathematics and science achievement. (p. 27)
>
> A volatile mismatch exists between the organization and curriculum of middle grade schools, and the intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal needs of young adolescent…. The ability of young adolescents to cope is often further jeopardized by a middle grade curriculum that assumes a need for an intellectual moratorium during early adolescence. Some educators consider the young adolescent incapable of critical, complex thought during rapid physical and emotional development. Minimal effort, they argue, should be spent to stimulate higher levels of thought and decision making until the youth reaches high school and becomes teachable again. Existing knowledge seriously challenges these

assumptions. Yet many middle grade schools fail to recognize or to act on this knowledge. (p. 32)

The gloom-and-doom representation of schools is countered by arguments which portray a much more favorable picture of American public education. This rosy scenario is based on alternative interpretations of studies dealing with international comparisons, SAT test score trends, and other indications of school effectiveness. Drawing upon reviews of research by Braecy, Berliner, and others, George concludes that: "There is no evidence whatsoever of a decline in test scores in American Schools" (p. 13); "It is common sense... [that] the United States lead[s] the world in [mathematics and science as indicated by] scientific publications, patents, and awards" (p. 15): and "There is reason to believe that the Ministry of Education in Japan 'manipulates the test scores' [to make Japanese schools look better]" (p. 16). As is the case with the portrayers of gloom-and-doom, certain ironies car be found in the writing of the persons advancing the rosy scenario. Thus, for example, the new bible for the rosy scenario, Berliner and Biddle's (1995) book, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myth, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* is liberally punctuated with commentary and out-takes from Kozol's (1991) devastating account of urban schools, *Savage Inequalities.* One would think that if the scenario is as rosy as these authors portray, they would he classifying Kozol's book as another example of "myth and fraud" rather than lionizing it.

In view of different opinions about the quality of our schools, it would be easy for both sides of the argument to reanalyze and reinterpret the studies again and again in an effort to counter the assertions of the opposition. Thus, for example, the gloom-and-doom proponents argue that current high levels of scientific publication are the result of the productivity of persons who went to school in the 1940s and the 1950s, a time when SAT scores were at an all-time high and ability grouping routinely used at all grade levels. A high proportion of present day patents, they would argue, are in fact being awarded to foreigners and non-American corporations. And the rosy scenario proponents argue that while *aggregate* SAT scores have fallen, "it is literally impossible to compute exactly what a difference in aggregate SAT scores means in terms of average numbers of questions answered correctly on the test" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, pp. 16–17). And so the battle continues and considerable energy is put into defending current practices and collecting more data.

The Numbers Never Lie … or Do They?

How can teachers, administrators, and policy makers make informed decisions about educational practices when even the so-called experts draw diametrically different conclusions from the same studies? And when we add the twists and turns that spin doctors place on research findings because of concerns about political correctness and ideological bias, we are left with a situation that makes valid conclusions almost impossible. Without a high degree of expertise in statistical analysis and detailed knowledge about the major studies surrounding a topic such as interpretations of SAT data, it is difficult for anyone to tell what the "numbers" mean, how they were arrived at, and how the data can assist us in our search for the truth.

The me-as-researcher method requires that we address difficult and perplexing questions. Where do the anti-grouping advocates send their own kids to school? What aspirations do they

have for their own children? What type of education do you want for your own children? How do you want any form of your children's individuality, whether it be an advanced ability or disability, to be dealt with by the school? We also need to ask high achieving students how they would like their education to be structured. Do they feel that school is a challenging and enriching place? An if so, which experiences make it so? These kinds of questions may be ridiculed by the experts and the stump orators, but we believe that they are as valid a method of inquiry for educational professionals as the barrage of statistics or impassioned rhetoric of persons who want us to think like them We [the authors] ask you to consider George's proposition about the "hard evidence" in a way that makes sense to you, and to draw your own conclusions about the best ways of inuring the academic needs of all students

Privilege or Opportunity?

> ***George's Preposition Two: The implementation of gifted programs frequently involves special grouping arrangements which provide GT students with leaning privileges which are denied to the other middle school students, depriving these students of their proper share of the resources that the middle school has to offer.***

> **Alternative Proposition Two**
> **The implementation of a broad array of differentiated learning opportunities guarantees that the uniqueness, individuality, and special needs of *all* middle school students will be honored and respected.**

Reductio ad Absurdum!

The main difference between the original and alternate e propositions is whether or not one views different types of school services as a privilege or an opportunity. But regardless of the play on words, differentiated services frequently require special grouping arrangements, including those cases when group size equals one student. Our position on the grouping issue has been dealt with in our earlier chapter. We can only reiterate a strong commitment to the concept of differentiation and schoolwide enrichment by offering Alternative Proposition Two, and recognizing and *honoring* that which is undeniable common sense—that differentiation cannot always be carried out effectively in a homogeneous, one-size-fits-all classroom. This alternative proposition is consistent with a democratic philosophy of education that is applicable to all students. And, unlike George's proposition, it can withstand the logical test *of reductio ad absurdum* (disproving a proposition by showing the absurdity of its inevitable conclusion). This test asks what will happen if you carry an idea or principle to its extended extreme. Let us examine George's proposition with an eye toward *reductio ad absurdum* in the practical operation of a school.

Consider what a school would he like if it did not have differentiated types of services (including alternative grouping arrangements), if all resources were equally distributed, or if it followed George's advice when he says that than seems to be little justification for the existence of enrichment programs. First, we would have to eliminate all special education services! This may sound harsh, but these services do cost more money per student than general allocations.

They do require specially trained personnel, and sometimes special equipment and facilities, and even special transportation services. Second, we would need to eliminate all sports programs as well as hand and chorus programs, because teachers who direct these programs are usually paid extra, special equipment and facilities are used, and students who participate in them are grouped according to special interests and talents. Heaven forbid, they are sometimes even grouped *within* groups! Is it not undemocratic to put all the altos together or, for that matter, all those who play the flute? *Reductio ad absurdum!*

Next to go would be extracurricular activities such as the drama club that our middle school daughter loves so much. In addition to the use of school facilities and access to a "late bus," these students were actually indulged with field trips to cheater productions at university and professional stage companies. And speaking of indulgences, what about students in Hartford's Bulkeley High School Russian Club (92% African American and Hispanic, if you care to raise the question) who were indulged with a three-week trip to Russia (after working all year to earn the money to go) as well as the opportunity to serve as hosts to Russian teenagers visiting the United States. Special learning opportunities and resources? Absolutely! Band, chorus, drama club, and Russian Club are undeniably a differentiated deployment of services, but they are also the special kinds of opportunities that turn schools into inviting and exciting places rather than places that try to force-fit all students into one prescribed curriculum.

"Bur wait a minute," you might say, "that's *different.* Can't *anyone* join the Russian Club or try out for the chorus?" Of course they can, and this approach to talent development is the fundamental difference between what many present day advocates of gifted education support rather than the restrictive programs that George attacks. We believe, unequivocally, that schools should be places for talent development and that a major goal of education should be to identity and nurture the talents of all of our students. Once again, by substituting the word *opportunity* for privilege, we begin to address the goals we seek to accomplish in schoolwide enrichment, which is based on a continuum of services broad enough to provide special opportunities for most, if not all, students.

The Tough Questions

Again, you might say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, but you're still avoiding the tough questions! What about the kids who are just plain smart? Who are not in band, or chorus, or Russian club?" There are, indeed, some "tough" questions that figure into the grouping issue which must be addressed. What do we do with a group of middle school students (within or across grade levels) who are interested in and capable of dealing with calculus or statistics, or who would welcome the opportunity to become involved in a critical analysis of the works of Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn, and other Russian writers? Would these be addressed by a middle school curriculum which "assumes a need for an intellectual moratorium during early adolescence" (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Do not the principles of equality of opportunity and differentiation of learning apply equally to these students as much as they do to kids who kick a soccer ball exceptionally well or sing with perfect pitch? Imagine for a moment that one of these students is *your* son or daughter and apply the me-as-researcher method to the following questions. Would you want him or her to have an opportunity for high levels of challenge in math or literature? To have a feeling of belonging by working with others of similar interest and

achievement level? And whom would you want to teach the math or Russian literature group—a teacher assigned at random, or one who has a knowledge and passion for the subject matter that will make the learning experience what one middle school student described as "a small slice of heaven in a generally uninteresting school day?" Does equity go out the window just because these students happen to be different in a high achieving rather than low achieving direction?

Before we even begin to think about means (i.e., *how* will we serve the advanced math or literature groups in our example), we must first answer the tough questions in the previous paragraph. And if the answers to these questions suggest that you do, in fact, support different types of educational experiences to meet the different needs of students, then we can begin to explore a whole range of the ways in which both differentiation and equity can be accomplished. We have offered one such example in our previous chapter that described the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. In that chapter we also described examples of successful bridge programs that have allowed highly motivated but low skills students to gain the background necessary to pursue advanced courses and a college education.

George's second proposition is undoubtedly propelled by the wave of political correctness surrounding concerns about equity in American education. We understand and appreciate his concern in making schools better for all students, and we have offered a concrete plan for doing it. But if we are to give meaning in the form of real school practices to currently popular clichés (e.g., "Success for all" and "All students can learn"), then we must exercise our imaginations far beyond the simplistic solution of doing away with various kinds of grouping practices and offering a one-size-fits-all curriculum. Many persons on both sides of the controversy have agreed that grouping, *per se,* is not the central issue. Rather, what we do with students in a broad variety of instructional settings that will make schools more effective and enjoyable places *is* the issue. To be certain, this challenge is not as rudimentary as the one George proposes, but it holds the promise of malting schools into the valued and trusted and joyful places that they should be in the eyes of all students and their parents.

Poisoned Wells and Straw *Persons*

George's Proposition Three: In their eagerness to establish effective programs, some advocates for gifted and talented students have been guilty of less than professional activity in their interpretation of the evidence on middle schools, gifted programs, ability grouping, and the recommendations which they issue for school programs related to that research.

Alternative Proposition Three
You cannot influence those whom you offend!

In our earlier chapter, we discussed the need for a search for solutions rather than drawing rigid battle lines between persons with opposing points of view. The title of this book is, after all, *Dilemmas in Talent Development in the Middle Grades*; and, accordingly, we have tried to keep the emphasis on talent development rather than trashing opposing arguments or the persons who hold them. Our Alternative Proposition Three is simply intended to reemphasize this perspective. Name calling, protestation of unprofessionalism, and accusations about lack of

"civic responsibility," "moral obligation," "logic accuracy, balance, and fairness" remind us of propaganda techniques that are offered as substitutes for research findings, logical analysis, and plain old common sense. George would lead us to believe that all of the research that he cites is "evidence," and that any findings to the contrary are obviously inaccurate, biased, or out of date. Left-handed slaps at America's Ivy League institutions (a propaganda technique called plain folks appeal) ignore the contributions that these research institutions have made to the improved health, economic growth, and quality of life aiming all of our citizens. George discussed how "America dominates the world in scientific publications, patents, and awards." We are certain that an examination of at least some of the sources of this productivity would lead back to the faculty and graduates of the institutions at which he takes cheap shots. The me-as-researcher method of inquiry asks you to examine the roles that high achieving and highly motivated people have played in the improvement of all walks of life. On an even more personal level, ask yourself what kind of university you would like your own child to attend if she or he were "off-the-scale" in a particular ability.

George's most obvious use or propaganda is a technique called poisoning the well. Just for the fun of it, picture what George would have us believe. In a smoke-filled room, George Bush, Bill Clinton, the governors from the 50 states, and Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, are gathered around a table with a group of right-wing ideologues. Only a few carefully selected journalists such as the editor of the arch-conservative *Blumenthal Education Litter* have been invited so that the "right" message (no pun intended) will get out to parents of the gifted and the public in general. We note, of course, that the group includes both, Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives. But regardless of these persons' political persuasions, the agenda of this unlikely alliance is to do one and only one thing—conspire to destroy America's system of free public education and replace it with a voucher system "in order to justify the removal of gifted and talented learners from the mainstream regular classroom to support the creation of privileged, miniature private academies within the public schools" (p. 23). We believe that George's conspiracy theory might be the stuff out of which fiction is made, but in order to even fictionalize such nonsense, he will first have to unravel a few logistical problems.

First, why would politicians, who are mainly concerned with delivering *good* news and appealing to *a majority* of voters, suppress reports about school success such as the *Sandia Report*; and why would they place their political careers on the line for the benefit of an extremely small percentage of our nation's school children? Politicians woo majorities because that is the way they can be re-elected. Political support for gifted programs has, in fact, been very limited. In the very best of times, advocates for gifted education have only been able to gain appropriations of less than one-half of one percent of state educational moneys; and at the federal level, appropriations have been so small as to appear only as an asterisk in the federal budget. Compare these figures with the billions of state and federal dollars that have been allocated for compensatory programs. You do not need to be a rocket scientist to see how and where the politicians have invested their energy and their money.

Second, programs for the gifted and talented, with their emphasis on creative and critical thinking, have actually been on the "hit lists" of political conservatives because, heaven forbid, such programs might reach young people to think for themselves. For example, the American

Family Association of Arkansas, a conservative parent group, recently led a vigorous campaign to close down the Governor's School or Arkansas (a summer program for academically and artistically talented students) because, they said, "it was anti-Christian and a tool for brainwashing" (Governor's School, 1995).

Third, George further attempts to poison the well by trying to create relationship between what he calls "the lunatic fringe," the *Blumenthal Educational Letter*, and persons advocating programs for the gifted. Because we [the authors] are associated with the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, we receive virtually every publication in field and every syndicated news article (through our university news clipping service) that discusses programs and issues related to gifted education. We have never seen or heard of the *Blumenthal Education Letter* until reading George's chapter. But once again, we ask that you apply the me-as-researcher technique. Have you ever seen this newsletter floating around your school or district? Have any items form it been reproduced in local newspapers, gifted program documents, or literature circulated by parent advocacy groups? Are the parents who advocate gifted programs, or any aspect of high quality education for that matter, associated with only one political party? If the answers to any of these questions is no, then the me-as-researcher method of analysis must lead you to conclude that George is, indeed, poisoning the well.

Finally, the poisoning the well technique can also be seen in George's off-handed remark about how gifted advocates "mock" the personal and social concerns of young adolescents, how they are insensitive to desecration, the eradication or poverty, the disintegration of cities, the development of community and unity, and other concerns related to moral obligation and civic responsibility. (An interest in personal and social development as well as other societal issues is reflected in these divisions of the National Association for Gifted Children: Counseling and Guidance, Early childhood, Future Studies, Global Awareness, Special Populations, and Parent and Community Divisions.) It is also worth mentioning that one of only four Position Papers published by this organization deals with personal and social development.) At the risk of being obstreperous, we are surprised he did not add damage to the rain forests and depletion of the ozone layer to his list! These important societal issues should be everyone's concern, but to place the responsibility on one group simply because their advocacy efforts are focused elsewhere is nothing short of deceit and quackery. *Every* individual and group prioritizes the areas in which they work and to which they will devote their time and energy. George's poisoning the well tactic regarding these larger societal issues could he applied to almost any individual or group that is not "out there" on the barricades fighting to reverse every societal impairment. Each of us, including George, must examine his or her own priorities and commitments and ask ourselves when is the last time we "marched" for one of the issues mentioned above. And if the answer is not recently, and not very often, then waving the flag about these larger societal issues is merely a smoke screen to divert attention away from the heart and soul of what education is all about—effective and enjoyable learning for all students, *including* high as well as average and low achieving young people. The me-as-researcher method of analysis asks the reader to use his or her own judgment about whether or not these larger societal issues can be blamed on gifted program advocates, or are they part of a poisoning the well strategy? Each person must examine his or her own positions, values, and actions as well as those of the people we know and with whom we work.

George comments: “Some of the more extremist advocates for the gifted set up ‘straw man’ arguments that the most inexperienced freshman debater would recognize as illogical and unprofessional.” Needless to say, extremism in *any* form should always be questioned. But truly experienced debaters recognize that extremism, by definition, does not represent the mainstream position on anything, otherwise it would not be extreme. When George uses an attack on extreme positions as the centerpiece of his argument, we must raise the question: Who is setting up a straw man? We [the authors] and the majority of present-day leaders in our field support what is today a much more flexible, inclusive, and accepted approach to differentiation and talent development. George’s attack or present-day mainstream thought would be akin to us writing an article that treated today’s middle schools as it they were still junior high schools. The orientation toward middle level education has changed and so has the orientation toward developing the gifts and talents of young people.

And the present-day orientation about a broader approach to talent development is not exactly new. Our article entitled “What Makes Giftedness? Reexamining a Definition” (Renzulli, 1978), the most widely cited publication in the field, is 20 years old. And when George says that the field is insensitive to minorities, and has only recently addressed minority group concerns, we remind the reader that articles such as “Talent Potential in Minority Group Students” (Renzulli, 1973) appeared a quarter century ago. A creditable examination of the literature and the history of the gifted education movement will reveal that numerous publications, conferences, and symposia have been devoted entirely to broadened conceptions of giftedness and multicultural populations. In our current work at the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, the Absolute [Federal] Priority Number 1 that guides our research is a focus on the full range of at-risk students. If gifted programs are the subversive agenda of conservative forces in government, we wonder how this priority about at-risk populations sneaked through the agenda of the hypothetical meeting in the smoke-filled room mentioned above!

We are not arguing that restrictive practices have never been a part of the history of gifted education or that some persons in the field do not continue to support more restrictive ideologies. Nor do we disagree that some state guidelines for gifted programs lag behind contemporary research and recommended programming practices. But this situation, which is not unique to the gifted education field, is almost always the case when there is a research-into-practice gap. But an examination of state regulations and guidelines reveals that major changes are taking place at the state level and that the trend is decidedly toward more flexible and inclusive approaches to talent development. New guidelines for identification have been introduced in some states, and other states have introduced waivers and alternative procedures to promote the inclusion of more diversified types of talents and members of traditionally overlooked groups. Just when major strides are being achieved in more diversified approaches to differentiation and incision, stump orators, persons with their own axes to grind, and those who want to explain away a general dissatisfaction with the quality of our nation’s schools seem to want to blame everything on “the gifted.” Throwing out the baby with the bath water has never been a solution for making anything better. We refer you once again to the sections about the secret laboratories of school improvement and broadened conceptions of giftedness discussed in our earlier chapter. If George and other critics of gifted programs care about developing the talents of all of America’s youth, then their lofty alarm and impressive energy would be greatly appreciated in building rather than

attempting to destroy a very delicate but creative and well-intentioned component of American education.

George's Proposition Four: Educators have more urgent concerns which require the concerted energy and commitment of all of us.

Alternative Proposition Four
The most urgent concern of educators is to make each learning experience for each and *every* student as enjoyable, exciting, rewarding, and as valuable as it can be.

In the previous section, we discussed the larger societal issues that George is alluding to when he talks about the "more urgent concerns" in his fourth proposition. The most urgent concerns of teachers and administrators are the ways in which we can deliver enjoyable and effective learning because that is the domain over which we have the most immediate influence. This influence is manifested mainly in our daily work, but we also believe that practitioners must become more politically active and responsible for guiding the kinds of decisions that affect our daily work. We will discuss ways of pursuing this responsibility in the final section of this chapter. At this time, suffice it to say that there is nothing more urgent than developing the gifts and talents of all children to the highest levels possible. These gifts and talents are our country's greatest natural resources. Good schools may not be powerful enough to correct society's ills, but if we do an effective job in our schools and classrooms, we as educators will contribute our fair share to the urgent concern of societal improvement.

To be painfully frank, we thought that George might be using hyperbole in the discussion of his fourth proposition. Is he serious when he argues *for* "a uniform education" for everyone and *against* trying to "educate every student to the limits of his or her ability?" Or when he writes that "asking the schools to organize and operate so as to provide enrichment or acceleration beyond a curriculum which provides a uniform education may be *unconstitutional*" (pp. 33–34, italics added). We are reminded of the following excerpt from Kurt Vonnegut's short story entitled "Harrison Bergeron" (Vonnegut, 1968):

> The year was 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal before God and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anyone else. Nobody was better looking than anyone else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General. (p. 55)

So begins a story that tells about smart people who are required to wear electronic devices to keep them from thinking faster or better than others; about outstanding dancers who are required to attach sandbags to their ankles so that they will not excel above the "universal standard" set by the Handicapper General's office, and other forms of government control designed to keep everybody equal. We should keep Vonnegut's allegory in mind as we drink about the implications of declaring enrichment and acceleration to be unconstitutional or arguing that the state is only allowed to provide a uniform education to all of its citizens. Education in a

democracy should serve as *the* primary source for liberating the mind and advancing knowledge, motivation, and the creative spirit that will result in the continuous improvement of the human condition. We do not disagree with George when he describes rampant present-day problems such as teenage pregnancy, high dropout rates, and growing poverty rates among children. And we also agree that all children deserve a quality education and that we should devote our attention and energy to these problems. But we fail to see a connection between these needs and George's arguments for "a uniform education" and for the elimination of programs that challenge high achieving students. In many cases these programs are a saving grace in areas that serve poor youngsters: what one urban educator described as "an academic way out" that is equivalent to how basketball serves as a higher education vehicle for gifted athletes. And finally, speaking of ways out, how will our society find the people who are capable of solving some or the pressing problems George mentions, as well as a host of other medical, nutritional, environmental, social, and economic problems, if we do not devote time to developing the talents of our young people? There is nothing more valuable nor important to our nation, and all the nations of the world, than the vast talent potentials of our young people. These potentials are the world's most value le and renewable natural resource. When we even flirt with recommendations about "a uniform education" and doing away with enriched and accelerated learning, then Kurt Vonnegut's Handicapper General might already be here, disguised as a thing we call our public school system.

Avoiding the Handicapper General by Balancing Deductive With Inductive Approaches to Learning

We believe that enrichment reaching and learning may be a successful alternative for the development of talents in our students. We will argue, however, that in spite of all that has been written, every theory of teaching and learning can he classified into one of two general models. There are, obviously, occasions when a particular approach transcends both models; however, for purposes of clarifying the main features of enrichment learning and teaching we will treat the two main models as polar opposites. Both models of leaning and teaching are valuable in the overall process of schooling, and a well-balanced school program must make use of both of these general approaches to learning and teaching.

Although many names have beer, used to describe the two models than will be discussed, we will simply refer to them as the Deductive Model and the Inductive Model. The Deductive Model is the one with which most educator are familiar and the one that has guided the overwhelming majority of what takes place in classrooms and other places where formal learning is pursued. The Inductive Model, on the other hand, represents the kinds of learning that take place outside of formal school situations A good way to understand the difference between these two types of learning is to compare how learning takes place in a typical classroom with how someone might learn new material or skills in real world situations. Classrooms are characterized by relatively fixed time schedules, segmented subjects or topics, predetermined sets of information and activity, tests and grades to determine progress, and a pattern of organization that is largely driven by the need to acquire and assimilate information and skills imposed from above and from outside the classroom. The major assumption in the deductive model is that current learning will have transfer value for some future problem, course, occupational pursuit, or life activity.

Contrast this type of learning with the more natural chain of events that takes place in inductive situations such as a research laboratory, business office, or film studio. The goal in these situations is to produce a product or service. All resources, information, schedules, and sequences of events are directed toward this goal, and evaluation and assessment (rather than grading) is a function of the quality of the product or service as viewed through the eyes of client or consumer. For example, everything that results in learning in a research laboratory is for present use; and, therefore looking up new information, conducting an experiment, analyzing results, or preparing a report is focused primarily on the present rather than the future. Even the amount of time devoted to a particular project cannot be determined in advance because the nature of the problem and the unknown obstacles that might be encountered prevent us from prescribing rigid schedules.

The deductive modal has dominated the ways in which most formal education is pursued, and the "track record" of the model has been less than impressive. Ono need only to reflect for a moment on his or her own school experience to realize that with the exception of basic language and arithmetic, much of the compartmentalized material learned for some remote and ambiguous future situation is seldom used in the conduct of daily activities. The names of famous generals, the geometric formulas, the periodic table, and the parts of plant are quickly forgotten; and even if remembered, they do not have direct applicability to the problems that most people encounter in their daily lives. This is not to say that previously learned information is unimportant, but its relevance, meaningfulness, and endurance for future use is minimized when it is almost always learned apart from real life situations.

Deductive learning is based mainly on the factory model or human engineering conception of schooling which has developed around inflexible schedules that fit into the school day rather than the ideal conditions for reaching and learning. The underlying psychological theory is behaviorism, and the central concept of this ideology is that schools should prepare young people for smooth adjustment into the culture and work force of the society at large. A curriculum based on deductive learning must be examined in terms of both what is taught and how it is taught. The issue of what is (or should he) taught has always been the subject of controversy, ranging from a conservative position that emphasizes a classical or basic education curriculum to a more liberal perspective that includes contemporary knowledge and life adjustment experiences (e.g., driver education, sex education, computer literacy). By and large, American schools have tried to adapt what is taught to changes taking place in our society. Recent concerns about kinds of skills that will be required in a rapidly changing job market have accelerated curricular changes that will prepare students for careers in technological fields and what has been described as a post-industrial society. Nowhere is this change more evident than in the emphasis that is being placed currently on thinking skills and interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum. These are viewed as favorable developments so far as schoolwide enrichment is concerned; however, the deductive model still places limitations on learning because of restrictions on *how* material is taught.

Although most schools have introduced teaching techniques that go beyond traditional drill and recitation, the predominant instructional model continues to be a prescribed and presented approach to learning. The teacher, textbook, or curriculum guide prescribes what is to be taught, and the material is presented to students in a predetermined manner. Educators have

become more clever and imaginative in the teaching models employed, and it is not uncommon to see teaches using approaches such as discovery learning simulations, cooperative learning, inquire training, problem-centered learning, concert learning, and a host of variations on these basic models. More recent approaches include simulated problem solving through the use of interactive video discs and computer programs. Some of these approaches certainly make learning more active and enjoyable than traditional, content-based deductive learning, but the "bottoms line" is that there are certain predetermined bodies of information and thinking processes that students are expected to acquire. The instructional effects of the deductive model are those directly achieved by leading the learner in prescribed directions. As indicated above, there is nothing inherently "wrong" with the deductive model; however, it is based on a limited conception of the role of the learner. It fails to consider variations in interests and learning styles, and it always places students in roles of lesson learners and exercise doers rather than authentic, first-hand inquirers. There is also no inherent value in doing things the way they have always been done, for little progress would ever he made if we continued to follow that mindset.

Inductive learning, on the other hand, focuses on the *present use* of content and processes as a way of integrating material and thinking skills into the more enduring structure of the learner's repertoire. And it is these more enduring structures that have the greatest amount of transfer value for future use. When content and processes are learned in authentic, contextual situations, they result in more meaningful uses of information and problem solving strategies than the learning that takes place in artificial, preparation-for-the-future situation. If persons involved in inductive learning experiences are given some choice in the domains and activities in which they are engaged, and if present experience is directed toward realistic and personalized goals, this type of learning creates its own relevancy and meaningfulness. This type of education focuses on creative productivity and learning how-to-learn skills and will complement our move toward a new century in which constant change may be the nature of life.

If we agree that people do learn when they are outside of schools and classrooms, in the "real world" as it is sometimes called, then we need to examine the dimensions of this type of learning and the ways that real world learning can be brought into the school. But we must also be extremely cautious whenever we think about bringing anything into the school. Our track record in this regard has been one of structuring and institutionalizing even the most innovative approaches to learning. We recall how the much heralded concept of Discovery learning ended up being what a colleague called "sneaky telling" in which teachers waited until students "discovered" the answer that the teacher had been waiting for. We also recall how a focus on thinking skills and creative thinking fell prey to the same types of formulas and prescribed activities that characterized the content-based curriculum which has been criticized so strongly by thinking skills advocates. Even our present fascination with computers and video discs is, in some cases, turning out to be little more than "electronic worksheets."

The type of enrichment learning and teaching mentioned in our earlier chapter is essentially an inductive approach to learning; however, it draws upon selected practices of deductive learning. Our argument is not an indictment of deductive learning but, rather, a need to achieve balance between the two major approaches. Introducing inductive learning into the school is important for several reasons. First, schools should be enjoyable places that students want to attend rather than places they endure as part of their journey toward assimilation into the

job market and the adult world. Second, schools should be places where students participate in and prepare for intelligent, creative, and effective living. This type of living includes learning how to analyze, criticize, and select from among alternative sources of information and courses of action; how to think effectively about unpredictable personal and interpersonal problems; how to live harmoniously with one another while remaining true to one's own emerging system of attitudes, beliefs, and values; and how to confront, clarify, and act upon problems and situations in constructive and creative ways. Finally, inductive learning is important because our society and democratic way of life are dependent upon an unlimited reservoir of creative and effective people. A small number of rare individuals have always emerged as the thinkers and problem solvers of our society. But we cannot afford to leave the emergence of leaders to chance, nor can we waste the undeveloped talents of so many of our young citizens who are the victims of poverty and the negative consequences that accompany being poor in America. All students must have the opportunity to develop their potentials and to lead constructive lives without trampling on or minimizing the value of others in the process.

Finally, returning, to our previous chapter, we want to reiterate that the academic freedom and the opportunities for experimentation afforded programs for the gifted and talented have resulted in the kinds of enrichment learning and teaching we believe can be viable alternatives to the proliferation of didactic models that have been the center-piece of most school reform initiatives. Gifted programs, even when they follow practices that are more restrictive than many people would like, are still the best experimental laboratories for total school improvement, and for this reason alone, it is curious why so many leaders in education are pursuing a vendetta that could lead to their demise.

Gifted Programs and the Bicycle Riders

People seeking to shout out their stand on the popular side of political correctness have turned gifted program bashing into a veritable cottage industry. It is always easy to attack the worst-case stereotypes of any practice, whether the practices be in business management, law enforcement, social welfare, or public education. Such attacks on worst-case scenarios are the centerpiece of George's chapter, and these worst-case scenarios have also acted as a target for other persons who are attempting to explain away educational initiatives that have not lived up to their expectations. Several examples can be found that illustrate how people have attempted to lay all the ills and woes of education at the feet of programs for the gifted. In *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and Attack on America's Public Schools,* Berliner and Biddle (1995) jump on the bandwagon with a montage of almost bizarre reasons why gifted programs are a "poor idea." For example, they argue that because "Tchaikovsky's musical talents did not bloom until he was in his twenties... and the major contributions of Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud did not begin to appear until those titans were in their forties" (p. 210), young persons should not be provided with enrichment and acceleration opportunities in school! These authors blatantly distort the summary chapter of Sternberg and Davidson's (1986) hook entitled *Conception*s *of Giftedness,* and they fall prey to the right-wing conspiracy argument that George presented in his chapter. Once again, we recommend that you not accept our interpretation of this work, but rather that you apply the me-as-researcher method by examining Berliner and Biddle's section about gifted programs (pp. 207–211), and then draw your own conclusions about the credibility of their work. We might ask you to remember, as you do this, that a recent federal report (U.S. Department of

Education, 1993) called these very programs the laboratories of school improvement and further suggested that many current innovations in teaching had their roots in these programs.

A few months ago we were perusing a copy of *The School Administrator* (Goldman, 1996), and we ran across a news item entitled, "The Movement's Forerunner Still Fighting for Nongradedness." The story is about Robert H. Anderson, a pioneer in the nongraded school movement and his speculations about why this approach to school organization had not caught on. According to the article's author, "He [Anderson] thinks the conservative backlash to multiage grouping that some educators are experiencing is coming from parents and community members who do not understand the benefits, as well as parents of gifted children who do not want to lose their privileged status." It seems as though if anything is not working, we needy scapegoat, and what could be more convenient than good "ole" gifted programs.

We are reminded of a serene took place in a film based on Katherine Ann Porter's (1945) landmark book entitled *Ship of Fools.* Herr Siegfried Rieber, newly enamored with the rise of Nazism in Germany, is pontificating about how all of Germany's troubles are the fault of the Jews. Karl Glocken replies, "Yes, yes, the Jews and the bicycle riders." "Why the bicycle riders?" asks Herr Rieber. "Why the Jews?" responds Glocken.

Perhaps, instead of placing all the blame for the growing dissatisfaction with our schools on programs for gifted students, we could end this response with a call for unity, creativity, and a commitment to work together to provide challenging, rewarding learning experiences for all students in our schools while simultaneously realizing that these learning experiences will never be the same for everyone.

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