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AUTHOR Davis, Nelda
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ABSTRACT

This guide, one of a series designed to aid social studies teachers, deals with methods for providing for the academically talented. After pointing out the problems of identification, basic principles for special to regular class programs are discussed. Suggested activities and methods for the social studies cover the areas of reading, creative projects, news coverage, oral activities, and seminars, clubs and other resources. Each of these areas is examined for creative ways to teach social studies skills to the superior student. A summary of the guide offers seven goals by which to evaluate the work of the academically talented in social studies. A bibliography includes general information on the gifted, as well as information in the field of the social studies specifically. Related documents are SO 005 979 through SO 006 000. (KSM)

How To Work with the Academically Talented in the Social Studies

NELDA DAVIS
Supervisor of Secondary Education
Prince Georges County, Maryland

Caring for the needs of better students is no new problem for the good social studies teacher. However, with today's added emphasis on providing for the academically talented, it may be useful to take a searching look at our practices to see just how adequate they are. Of course, the reader will understand that in an area as diverse and varied as the social studies, a review of methods for use in teaching the able student cannot be specific for all grades and subject areas. It is hoped that the methods listed will stimulate the reader to develop activities suitable for his own particular situation.

For the purpose of this discussion, the term "academically talented" will refer to those students who rank in the upper 15 to 20 per cent of the nation's school population. The percentage in individual schools may vary from a small per cent to a large one. The term "gifted" will be reserved for the top 2 to 5 per cent of the nation's school population.

The problem of the identification of academically talented students is one that must not be taken lightly by the teacher. Neither can the subject be covered in a few paragraphs. In the majority of the books listed in the general bibliography will be found sections on the identification of these students.

In a report from the trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching these rules are suggested to aid in the problem of the identification of the academically talented:

> The first rule—and the most important—is that diagnosis of the child's abilities must be a continuing process over years. It should include repeated testing, repeated appraisals through school marks, fresh yearly judgments by teachers and counselors. There are many reasons for such repeated testing. At any given age level, a test score may be invalid for one reason or another, a teacher may be mistaken in her judgment of a youngster, irrelevant factors — emotional or environmental — may obscure the child's talent at the time he is being judged. Furthermore, there are enigmas in individual development which we have not fathomed. By seeing the youngster at various ages, through the eyes of many individuals, measured by a variety of standards, we may be adequately cautious in approaching a subject which is puzzling at best.
>
> The second rule is that appraisals of academic talent must be based on many *kinds* of evidence. Scholastic aptitude tests provide one significant kind of evidence. Achievement tests provide another. School grades offer a third kind of evidence. The judgments of teachers expressed in rating scales or written comments are important. The views of counselors, deans, and others who have dealt with the youngster may be significant. There is *no* faultless measuring instrument for identifying the academically talented. Each type of measurement has its advantages and its limitations. The important thing is to make use of all available measures as intelligently as possible.
>
> The third rule is that appraisals should not be centered exclusively on so-called intellectual aptitudes but should take into account motivation, interests, and other traits which powerfully affect intellectual performance.[1]

Some Guiding Principles

Before plans are made for the academically talented in the social studies, certain basic understandings about such a program should be considered by the planners. These understandings hold true whether the students are in a special class or in a regular class.

1. Any plan that is devised for the better student is a part of the total school program. Plans are made for the physically handicapped, the hard of hearing, and the mentally retarded in order to care for these individual differences. In the same way the indi-

[1] *Education of the Academically Talented,* Summary of a Discussion by the Trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1958. p. 4.

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vidual differences of the academically talented must be considered. Such a program should not be set apart from the school as a whole.

2. Teaching methods for the academically talented are not necessarily spectacular. Raise good teaching methods to the nth degree, and you have the best teaching methods for this group of students.
3. Grouping is not the panacea for all the problems relating to the academically talented. While it is true that grouping will limit the range of abilities, it must be recognized that there may be a wide variation of abilities within such a group. There is the danger that in a class so grouped, the students will be taught as a group and not as individuals.
4. There is no one answer or one method that works for all the academically talented. While much can be gained from knowing what other teachers and other systems are doing to meet their problems, to bring intact the plans from one system to another is to deny the very premise upon which the program is built: the consideration of individual differences. Not only are students unique, but also the locality and the teacher.
5. While freedom to investigate is necessary for all social studies students, it is imperative that these academically talented students be given the opportunity to consider controversial questions in a scientific spirit of inquiry.
6. The foundation of any program for the academically talented is the teacher. To paraphrase the 13th Chapter of First Corinthians:

> Though we arrange a perfect schedule and have not a teacher with understanding both of the student and the subject, the program becomes as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.
>
> And though we study all the books written on the subject, and understand all the pedagese that they contain; and though we have all faith in the worth of our program, and have not a teacher with enthusiasm, the program is nothing.
>
> And though we spend our budget in supplying materials and books until the room overfloweth, and have not a teacher of vision, the program profits no one.

Suggested Activities and Methods

Methods are the vehicles we use to move toward our purposes. It is essential, therefore, that we know the purposes of a certain lesson or unit in order to choose the best method for teaching it. Many methods might be discarded if they were subjected to these questions: "Why am I using this particular method? What will I accomplish by using it?" For example, acceptance is easily found for a rich diet of reading for the gifted, but the question should be asked, "Reading for what purposes?"

Reading

For the academically talented student in the social studies there must be a greater depth of reading understanding than we expect from the average student. This above-average student must read even more critically and with more definite purposes. This does not belie the importance of reading for pleasure. We would hope that such skills in reading will increase his pleasure.

Too often a student is required to write a book report which may not challenge him to do any depth of thinking. In contrast, the student may be asked to compare *God's Angry Man* by Ehrlich with the first chapter in Catton's *This Hallowed Ground*. "In what ways do these two accounts agree or disagree as to the massacre at Pottawatomie Creek? Does Catton give his sources? What sources did Ehrlich use? Since Ehrlich emphasizes the strains of insanity in Brown's family, can the student find proof in other accounts of this explanation for his acts?" Also, a study of the books on John Brown could be assigned as a problem in discerning biases of the authors.

To consider critically what is read is a necessary and important skill. In the different grade levels the approach and the type of books will vary, but the methods can follow somewhat the same approach. By using Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, La Farge's *Laughing Boy*, and Cather's *Death Comes to the Archbishop* the student could compare descriptions of the American Indian. In regular classes, books on the same topic or person but of varying degrees of difficulty might be used for panel discussions. For example, the reluctant reader could read Richard Neuberger's *The Lewis and Clark Expedition* while the more advanced student would use *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, either in the original or the version edited by Bernard DeVoto. A possible addition to this panel could come from a checking for historical discrepancies of the fictionalized account of Sacajawea in *Sacajawea of the Shoshones* by Della G. Emmons.

Another approach to the wide use of books for the academically talented is the comparison of books on the same subject or by the same author. This may be either a group or an individual project. For example, the student may compare the treatment given by Marchette

Chute on the life of the Middle Ages in two of her books, one fiction and the other serious biography: *Innocent Wayfaring* and *Geoffrey Chaucer of England*. Or a comparison could be made of a subject as treated by different authors—*The Robe* by Douglas, *Quo Vadis* by Sienkiewicz, and *Ben Hur* by Wallace. Another grouping of books for comparison can be made on the basis of area; for example, *Seven Years in Tibet* by Harrer, *Beyond the High Himalayas* by Douglas, and *Lost Horizon* by Hilton. A group of books with the same setting may be discussed in terms of the differences in treatment, such as *Scarlet Pimpernel* by Orczy, *Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens, *Twelfth Physician* by Gibbs, *Scaramouche* by Sabatini and *Whirlwind* by Davis. A panel searching for the "why" in adventure might find the answers in these books: *Annapurna: First Conquest of an 8,000-Meter Peak* by Herzog; *Wind, Sand, and Stars* by Saint-Exupery, *The Spirit of St. Louis* by Lindbergh, *Tiger of the Snows* by Tenzing and Ullman.

Sharpening the student's ability to compare sources is a responsibility of the teacher for the academically talented in the social studies. As one example, the student may read chapter six in *The American Iliad, the Epic of the Civil War as Narrated by Eyewitnesses and Contemporaries* by Otto E. Eisenschiml and Ralph Newman for conflicting accounts of the battle between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac* and then compare these sources with the accounts given in various secondary accounts such as textbooks and general histories. This type of activity helps the student see the wide differences in interpretation given by various authors.

A continuation of this idea of comparing authors and textbooks may entail choosing a certain subject such as the Hundred Days of Napoleon and checking textbooks for the amount of space given to the subject, the motivation attributed to participants, their characterization, the values revealed, tone of the vocabulary used, and so on.

Another useful source of reading guidance for these students is found in bibliographies. A publication of the National Council for the Social Studies, *World History Book List for High Schools: A Selection for Supplementary Reading*, provides a useful list of books for students of world history. There are many other annotated lists of books that can be helpful. Two others which are particularly valuable to the social studies teacher are Carlsen and Alm's *Social Understanding Through Literature* and Hannah Logasa's *Historical Fiction and Other Reading References for Classes in Junior and Senior High Schools*.

Teachers of social studies may cooperate in making book lists with English teachers for American literature and its relationships to American history and problems of democracy; world literature, world geography, and world history. Student-made annotated bibliographies can accomplish a dual purpose: to open avenues of interest to the student and to emphasize the importance of service activities for the use of his classmates. It is possible through such a method to bring to the attention of others some otherwise neglected resources of the library.

Creative Projects

To be most effective and acceptable as teaching devices in the social studies, creative projects must be grounded in research and depth of understanding. Whether the outcome be a soap carving of a Viking ship or a three-act play on the American Revolution, this is the place and time to train the student in the basic skills of research. The beauty of a map never excuses inaccuracies.

Research techniques will vary from the simple proving of a statement in the earlier grades to the more complex writing of a research paper in the later grades. Perhaps the most difficult thing for the student to learn in the writing of such a paper is to limit his subject. Sometimes it is necessary to allow him to flounder in his errors until he learns by experience the necessity of defining his subject. Not only must he know how and where to locate sources and secondary accounts but also how to evaluate them. In addition, the skills of taking notes, writing outlines, and documenting his work with footnotes and bibliography must be acquired and skillfully used by the student.

If the academically talented student is allowed to give free rein to his imagination, he will need few suggestions for creative projects. The ability to put himself in the place of another, both in regard to a person and/or a period of history, could be used as a basis for certain creative work. Here again the foundation should be research. One important outcome of such a project should be better understanding of others, an essential element in the growth of any individual.

The unsolved problems of history may be used to interest students in preparing research papers. There are many that might be investigated. The following are suggested: the intention of the framers of the Sherman anti-trust law in regard to labor unions; the safety-valve theory in regard to western lands; John D. Rockefeller —robber baron or good business man?; the Embargo Act

—an abortive effort or an effective foreign policy?; government aid received by the early railroads; Mrs. Surratt—guilty or not guilty in the plot against Lincoln?

Variety can be achieved through the use both of group and individual projects. For example, a panel of students role playing as Socrates, Jefferson, Lincoln, Cotton Mather, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Ward Beecher, Emerson, Tolstoy, and Robert E. Lee, may discuss their views on slavery. Naturally each panel member would have to do research on his character in order to express accurate views.

Diaries, journals, and newspaper accounts have been used many times as methods for creative work. The academically talented student can think how to make this usual technique unusual in some way: accurate maps, imaginative drawings, precise models, accurately dressed dolls, and so on. Perhaps teacher-expectation of the "second mile" is the needed incentive.

The desire to see one's creative effort in print can be satisfied without too much expense. A mimeographed pamphlet can be as satisfactory as a printed book, both from the artistic point of view and from the author's. In addition, such an undertaking can give valuable experience in organization and planning.

One desirable outcome in acceptable social growth for the academically talented student comes from sharing creative work with other classes or individuals.

News Coverage

Depth of learning should be stressed in as many ways as possible in teaching the academically talented. In place of the current events report too often used for all students, a different treatment of the news may be used to strengthen this important part of the social studies. For example, a specific news item can be compared as to the treatment given it by cartoons, editorials, news coverage, and news analysis.

In addition, a comparison of different newspapers in the interpretation of the same news gives depth to this study. Through discussion in class certain criteria may be established for judging interpretation: "What seems to be the purpose of the article—to discredit, eulogize, report accurate information, give an opinion? Are the sources of information given? Can certain devices that influence the reader be detected—appeal to emotion instead of reason, giving one side only, use of glittering generalities, beginning with accepted facts and then proceeding to questionable points, indorsements from prominent people, use of slanted words, avoiding sources of information, or jumping on the band wagon?"

Gifted students in a regular class may serve as continuing news analysts, perhaps as specialists in certain areas. Another way in which their talents can be used is in the interpretation of political cartoons. The drawing of original cartoons may have value if they show a depth of understanding in the subject.

Oral Activities

Most academically talented students have the ability to verbalize. However, their ability here sometimes needs to be directed toward greater depth of thought, documentation of facts presented, and clarity of expression. To hold them to less than this is to fail in our responsibility.

In oral reports, the subjects assigned to these students may vary considerably from what is expected of others. For example, in place of reporting on the usual figures of the Industrial Revolution: (Watt, Cartwright, Arkwright, and others), better students may seek information on the English tool-makers of the early 1800's—Henry Maudsley, John Wilkinson, Joseph Bramah, Joseph Clement, Richard Roberts, James Naysmyth, and Sir Joseph Whitworth; or such Americans as Oliver Evans, Elisha Root, Thomas Blanchard, Stephen Fitch, and Frederick Howe. In another field, these students may make a contribution to the general knowledge of the class by finding out about the French attempts to colonize Florida in the 16th century under the leadership of Jean Ribault and René Laudonniere.

Criteria for evaluating oral reports should be established through class discussion prior to their presentation. By using these standards, the student can learn to place a proper value on his own work. With these accepted standards for evaluation, the appraisal from his classmates will tend to be more constructive and to the point.

Variety can be achieved through differences in presentation. The use of pictures, maps, globes, opaque projector, overhead projector, tape recorder, records, exhibits, models, and the public address system can be explored. Again, the difference between the average and the academically talented in making a report may be in their use of unusual and more elaborate methods of presentation, as well as in depth of understanding.

Seminars, Clubs, and Other Resources

Where the organization of the school permits, a small class using the seminar method can help students to develop a critical attitude toward their own ways of thinking and toward controversial issues. This type of class lends itself to the mature student, usually in the last year of senior high school. Thought-provoking books such

as *The Lonely Crowd* by Riesman or the study of contemporary problems may serve as the content of such courses. More important than the choice of subject matter, however, is the emphasis on documentation of opinion and depth of thought. Vital to the success of such a seminar is a teacher skilled in knowing when to participate and when to keep quiet.

Another type of seminar that has proved its worth for the academically talented in the social studies is one which makes use of outside experts. One such seminar in the Washington, D. C. area was planned in cooperation with the Service Center for Teachers of History. High school seniors who had completed their year of American history, had shown promise in the study of the social studies, and interest in the project were accepted. College professors met with the group once a month in the evenings, combining a lecture in depth on one area of American history with a period of discussion with the students. Each student was responsible for a certain amount of outside reading. Also, he reported to the current American history class in his school on some of the interesting parts of the lecture.

While it may be difficult to plan such an ambitious project in every locality, it is often possible to make better use of the resources found in most communities. An inventory of these resources, combining both avocational interest and vocational competencies, may serve as the basis for locating useful speakers. In addition, sponsorship for clubs may be gained from this group. A layman whose hobby is the history of his state or locality may perhaps be interested in serving as the sponsor for an alert group of students. Your state historical association should be helpful in ferreting out such people. Also, in this connection do not neglect the services of the American Historical Association. This organization established the Service Center for Teachers of History (400 A Street, S.E., Washington, D. C.) to assist teachers of the social studies.

The Advanced Placement Program, which provides descriptions of college-level courses in American history and European history and prepares examinations based on these courses, is a resource that should not be neglected by history teachers in the senior high school. At the present time, none of the other social sciences is offered. Information on this program may be obtained by writing to the Director of the Advanced Placement Program, College Entrance Examination Board, 425 West 117th Street, New York 27, New York.

One group essential to the success of a program for the academically talented is the parents. With their help, field trips, additional books, outside speakers, and extracurricular projects can be planned more easily.

Summary

In order to evaluate the work done with the academically talented in the social studies it is necessary to pit the results obtained against the goals established for the program. Specifically in the social studies what should our goals be for these students? The following are suggested:

1. Mastering the basic skills such as reading, listening, speaking, writing; and those skills unique to the social studies such as interpreting maps and globes and understanding time and chronology.
2. Developing the ability to think critically. This involves a level of attainment beyond that of the average student in evaluating information of various kinds, knowing and using tools of research, becoming adept in the process of problem solving, and recognizing biases and prejudices in materials.
3. Acquiring an understanding of citizenship and learning through practice the relationship between one's greater potential and one's responsibility to society.
4. Providing opportunity in the social studies for the development of creative talents of various kinds.
5. Furthering the ability to generalize and to see the relationship between various subject areas.
6. Helping each individual to place a realistic evaluation upon himself and his abilities.
7. Emphasizing depth of understanding in the various subject areas of the social studies.

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