

Guy M. Whipple

Guy M. Whipple, a psychologist, best known for his work in mental testing, is rarely if ever mentioned in contemporary circles when discussing gifted education. Whipple's interests were varied and wide and included gifted education, mental testing, reading instruction, and vocational education (Bagley, 1942). Whipple's 1910 seminal two-volume *Manual of Mental and Physical Tests* stood as the exclusive reference of psychological testers for nearly 20 years (Evans, 2004). Whipple also served with Lewis M. Terman as a member of the American Psychological Association's Committee on the Psychological Examination of Recruits, which developed the Army Alpha and Beta for use during World War I (Lagemann, 2000).

Whipple held great faith in the science of psychology and its applications to education.

To anyone who notes the evolution of educational thought and practice, it must be evident that one of the most clearly evident tendencies of the present day is the "psychologizing" of instruction—fitting of educational agencies to the needs of the individual pupil. For several years we have recognized the needs of pupils of subnormal mentality. We are now perceiving more clearly the even more crying needs of pupils of supernormal mentality. (Henry, 1920, p. 5)

Whipple, like Terman, also railed against those who charged that gifted education was somehow undemocratic. He described democratic education as the "equity of opportunity," and he asserted that gifted children were not being provided a fair opportunity to develop their potential and called for special classes to alleviate this inadequacy (Whipple, 1922). The education of gifted children, he insisted, not only cultivated their enormous potential but also benefited society at large (Whipple, 1923).

Whipple's early involvement in the foundational years of gifted education has yet to be recognized. *Classes for Gifted Children* (Whipple, 1919a) and his editorship of the 23rd National Society for the Study of Education Yearbook (NSSE) introduced the issue of educating gifted students to a larger audience of educators. These works offered templates for the application of mental tests to school populations and delineated appropriate educational adjustments necessary for "gifted students." During the process of conducting research and writing *Classes for Gifted Children* (1919a), Whipple began to refer to bright children as gifted children. In 1920, the Nineteenth Yearbook of the NSSE credited Whipple "[as having] done much to further the interest in special educational facilities for bright children . . . [and it is to him] we owe the term 'gifted' as the standard designation of children of supernormal ability" (Henry, 1920, p. 9).

Classes for Gifted Children (Whipple, 1919a) argued that a common pace of instruction for all children was impossible, so much so that special classes for "extra-dull" students were established, producing an extensive literature base and an expanded pedagogy for this group of students. Whipple therefore proposed that bright children could also benefit from specialized instruction adjusted to their mental abilities. Special classes for bright children brought a spate of additional questions regarding their selection and education (Whipple, 1919a).

Specifically, Whipple raised the following questions:

- At what grade ought pupils to be selected for the special class?
- By what method ought pupils to be selected for the special class?
- Does the teacher need special qualifications?
- Ought the course of study to continue the same?
- Or ought it to be enlarged by supplementary work?

- Or ought the course of study be abolished entirely?
- Ought the pupils to do more or to do less homework?
- Ought the methods of instruction—the use of illustration, of induction, of practice drills be altered?
- Ought the pupils to be encouraged to participate more actively in class discussions or ought these tendencies to be repressed in favor of rigorous drill and the development of a high degree of precise speed?
- What should be done to detect and to foster specialized ability such as talent in drawing, music, design, dramatic expression, mechanical pursuits, invention and the like? (Whipple, 1919a, p. 6)

Logically, Whipple believed that the obvious starting point rested with the method of selection. This required a natural pairing for Whipple, who was deeply entrenched in psychometrics and its application. From September 1916 to September 1917, Whipple undertook the investigation of the general problem of educating gifted children at Leal School, the largest public school, in Urbana, IL. The most pressing question for Whipple surrounded the adequacy of mental tests in sifting out gifted students from the normal population. However, a subsequent by-product of this investigation included the observations of classroom practices and organization in the special class formed for gifted children (Whipple, 1919a).

The “Special Room” consisted of 30 fifth- and sixth-grade students ranging in age from 10 years 6 months to 11 years 7 months. The teacher chosen by the superintendent of the Urbana school system had graduated from “one of the best normal schools in one of our western states and [is] also a graduate of the State University there” (Whipple, 1919a, p. 9). Interestingly,

it was noted that her superior training and academic background offset her perceived lack of initiative and resourcefulness (Whipple, 1919a).

After the continuous observation of the Special Room during the 1916–1917 school year, Whipple offered 18 recommendations for the adaptation of methods for classrooms with gifted students. The first eight recommendations pertained to any classroom, but posed additional significance in classrooms for gifted children.

1. Teachers of gifted children should possess a wealth of general knowledge in order to keep pace with a deluge of interests exhibited by gifted students.
2. The teacher should maintain an ample knowledge of theory and practice in order to adapt readily the methods of teaching to the educational needs of gifted children.
3. The teacher should have a certain level of unsuppressed energy, inspiration, and enthusiasm to keep up with his or her gifted charges.
4. The physical environment should promote independent learning, which included moveable desks and a variety of reference materials.
5. The teacher should encourage students to pursue projects under their own initiative.
6. Learning should emphasize the “principle of application,” which requires students to apply recently acquired knowledge to activities in the classroom.
7. Greater emphasis should be given to overarching ideas or themes rather than isolated facts.
8. The teacher should compress, telescope, or compound the curriculum according to interest, importance, or need of the students (Whipple, 1919a, 1919b).

The following 10 recommendations were specifically relevant to classrooms for gifted children:

1. Only the top 10% of students of the general school population should be selected for a Special Room for gifted children.
2. Children who exhibited a neurosis over their schoolwork should not be included in the gifted class so as not to perpetuate the image that gifted children were “freaks.”
3. Selection of gifted children should be made exclusively from mental tests as ratings by teachers and administrators were unreliable.
4. The Special Room teacher should advance with students from grade to grade, eliminating the issues involved in becoming acquainted with a new teacher. Teachers were also encouraged to keep detailed notes on the daily activities within the classroom. These notes could thus be transformed into a publication to assist educators working with similar student populations.
5. Drill should be reduced by half.
6. Direct instruction should also be reduced by half.
7. The discipline of students should be eliminated altogether if students were provided appropriate work to meet their needs.
8. If and when a student exhibited behaviors of vanity or egotism, the teacher should issue a “social check.” Whipple suggested that the child in question be given examples of work that were superior or at least equal to his own.
9. The depth of a subject should be emphasized rather than just what was included in the textbook.
10. The teacher should be given greater liberty and flexibility in

adjusting the curriculum to meet the needs of students (Whipple, 1919a, 1919b).

Whipple also recognized that, even in a Special Room, gifted students could cycle through two years of work in one year. The rapid advancement through curriculum allowed for the inclusion of other subjects such as foreign language, dramatics, and cultural studies in the Special Room. However, Whipple cautioned that adequate time should be given to all endeavors “for gifted children to learn what hard mental work is” (Whipple, 1919a, p. 125).

The idea of a “qualitatively different” curriculum for gifted learners harkens back to the foundational work conducted nearly 100 years ago. Similarities are evident between Whipple’s recommendations and current literature surrounding methods and practices for gifted learners. Graffam’s (2006) case study of teachers of the gifted details classroom practices that include the use of yearlong themes, subject integration across activities, student choice about what and how they want to study, differentiation, and curriculum compacting. The National Association for Gifted Children’s (n.d.) five guiding principals of curriculum and instruction include the following:

- differentiated curriculum must span grades K–12,
- regular classroom instruction must be changed to meet the needs of gifted learners,
- acceleration must be a flexible instructional opportunity,
- grade skipping must be provided, and
- a continuum of curriculum choices must be made available for gifted learners (¶ 4).

Historical research in the field of gifted education helps to gauge progress the field has made over the past century. With past and current recommendations continually appearing so similar, the question needs to be asked whether current practices are a refinement of these earlier recommendations or if they have developed completely disconnected from this earlier work, reflecting the “old wine, new bottle” phenomenon. **GCT**

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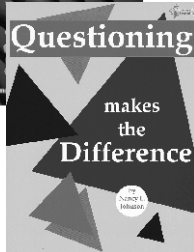

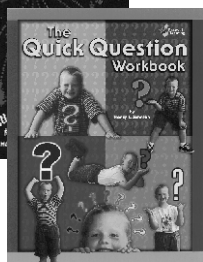


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