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Letters

Wary of Programs For Gifted Students

To the Editor:

I searched hard to find something redeemable in James R. Delisle's "[Justin's Genius](#)" (Commentary, May 1, 2002). Except for the name in the Commentary, which is my 7-year-old's name, I could find nothing worthwhile. Especially disturbing was the highlighted quote, "When gifted children are dismissed as being just like everyone else, they are bright enough to know this is wrong, but fragile enough to hurt from the insult to their intelligence."

I have worked with so-called "gifted and talented" children, heading up a large-city gifted program for three years and working with other gifted children in a private school. These experiences and those of working with gifted educators and researchers such as Joseph Renzulli, Howard Gardner, Reuven Feuerstein, Maxine Greene, Eliot Eisner, Harry Passow, Abe Tannenbaum, Fritz Ianni, and Leland Jacobs have taught me to understand that it is not the gift or talent a learner brings to life that is ultimately important. It is the motivation, diligence, resilience, vision, relentless pursuit, and hard work that ultimately lead to greatness.

These brilliant educators also taught me to avoid reliance on IQ as an indicator of intelligence. A few quoted Jerome Bruner in their work, his observation that "intelligence should not be defined as what you know but what you do when you don't know what to do."

The nature of programs for the gifted in most school systems is driven by the assumption that some students have gifts and talents that differentiate them from others. What if we accept at face value Mr. Delisle's thesis? What then? All too often a close scrutiny of the programs and curricula serving the so-called gifted and talented child can be equally applied to all children with similar successes. And more often than not, gifted-and-talented programs are formed under pressure from parents who take the attitude that meeting the needs of their children, vs. those of other people's children, is of the highest priority.

Ironically, many of those who have been identified as gifted due to their adult work did not perform well in school: Charles Darwin, Thomas Edison, Walt Disney, Maria Montessori, and Estee Lauder, among others.

Experience teaches that no science can forecast with certainty at an early age how much success an individual will attain. Nor can science invariably predict the late bloomer. It is vital that we not allow pseudoscience, or a blind belief that some individuals just can't perform at the level of the so-called gifted and talented child, to consign many students to lives of low expectations.

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