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*A couple of our teachers take a look here at the matter of instruction of the gifted. They approach the subject from somewhat different points of view — but not **opposing** viewpoints. Rather, the articles complement each other. Mrs. Judie Feenstra, a teacher at Heritage Protestant Reformed School in Hudsonville, looks first at the definition of giftedness, and then stresses the necessity of challenging the gifted through appropriate adaptations of the regular curriculum to meet their special academic needs. Left to themselves, she warns, they'll become average learners in no time at all. Mr. Harry Langerak, a teacher at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, while readily acknowledging the responsibility of the teacher to stretch the intellectual abilities of all students, including the gifted, emphasizes the importance of helping the gifted students develop attitudes which keep them from falling into "particular spiritual pitfalls which are peculiar to them." Both of these emphases, we say, are important for teachers and parents in their working together to develop properly the talents God has, for His own purposes, given in larger measure to some of our children. We therefore recommend the following articles for your consideration.*

Gifted?... or Having Gifts?

Judie Feenstra

There is an important difference between being gifted and having gifts. God gives each one of us gifts, some more than others, and we are responsible for using our gifts to the best of our ability. This is taught very plainly in the Parable of the Talents. However, some people not only have gifts given to them, but also they are gifted. What does this mean?

Putting a label on giftedness is like trying to describe beauty. Based on a variety of knowledge, we recognize beauty but can't define it concretely. So it is with giftedness. I will set forth some facts and conclusions about being gifted and you will be better equipped to recognize a gifted child.

The following is a list of characteristics that are frequently evident in the gifted:

- Displays a great curiosity about things, situations, or events.
- Is interested in a wide variety of things.
- Learns rapidly, easily, and efficiently.
- Walked and/or talked earlier than most children.

— Has a large vocabulary for his age.

— Shows an early interest in reading and words.

— Frequently reads before he enters school.

— Retains information without much rote or drill.

— Has a good memory.

— Makes collections of things that are advanced for his age.

— Uses a lot of common sense and practical knowledge.

— Reasons things out, thinks clearly, recognizes relationships.

— Knows many things of which other children are unaware.

— Can read books that are one or two years above age.

— Performs difficult mental tasks.

— Demonstrates intellectual curiosity.

— Shows perseverance and the capacity for self direction.

— Has long attention span for things of interest.

— Wants to learn.

An excellent memory is the most prevalent sign of giftedness.

Some early signs to watch for are:

— Unusual alertness, watching

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and listening intently.

- Eyes focusing on an object for a longer period of time than is true of other children.

- Walking before first birthday.

- Ambidextrous for some period of time.

- Use more complex sentence structure.

- Develop a larger vocabulary.

- Show an early interest in books.

- Express themselves better than other children.

- Avid interest in reading prior to school age — many have taught themselves.

- Unbounded curiosity.

Although not all gifted children will exhibit the same characteristics, if a child exhibits some of these early signs, giftedness may be indicated.

The single most distinguishing feature is the *way* they learn. They need far less details and fewer repeated instructions. They are and must be very active in the learning process. They easily learn that the process is the *path*, not the *goal* of learning.

To teach them we must understand their characteristics which they bring to learning. The following is a brief list of some of their learning characteristics:

- Learn faster, deeper.

- Insatiable appetites.

- See whole pictures — not parts.

- Divergent thinkers — bring facts together.

- Vary in interest.

- See patterns.

- Seem to learn effortlessly.

- Problem solvers.

- Need a facilitator.

Gifted students bring a deeper perspective to the same projects. We must deal with the nature of their intelligence rather than the level of their intelligence.

With their unusual characteristics also come unique problems. We assume that they are independent learners. **THEY ARE NOT!** They are very interested in learning, but they are not independent, they need guidance. Studies have shown that gifted students left unchallenged, become average students in a short period of time. They don't *remain* average if someone finds the key to teach them differently. They spend the majority of their time in the regular classroom so it is important that instructional adaptations be made in the regular education program for the unique instructional needs of the gifted. Intelligence is not static; it is capable of both increasing and decreasing.

Another problem that we come across when teaching them is that because the gifted child can often solve problems at the abstract level, he may lose some of the values that work could develop. Consequently, the gifted child

needs to learn that the knowing and the doing are two different things. He needs to make himself go through the process so that when he encounters a problem too hard even for him he will know the steps to take to arrive at a solution.

Research has shown us that twenty percent of any school population needs special education. Ten percent are slow learners or students with special problems and they are taught differently than the average. Ten percent are students with high I.Q.'s and yet their education, for the most part, is the same as the average. Working below their potential in a regular classroom

deteriorates their above average abilities.

Christian educators must make sure that the gifted children in their classes are developing all of their God-given academic talents rather than coasting through an unchallenging school curriculum.

Being gifted affects both the children who are gifted and those around them. Gifted students must learn through experience that the reason God has given them additional gifts is that they may build up the body of Christ. Christian educators must help their students see that all of life is service to God, and that in everything they do they must give their *best* to the Master. ■■■

Our Instruction of the Gifted

Harry Langerak

The subject of the instruction of the gifted has recently taken on new emphasis because of the reassessment which has taken place in the public school system. The world in its assessment of the public schools has come to the amazing conclusion that the mediocrity that characterizes much of public education has also affected those on whom it has pinned its hopes for tomorrow. The world which believes its

future rests with the gifted is concerned that it has failed them and now wonders what can be done to salvage the situation.

In seeking answers they have, not surprisingly, developed a thoroughly humanistic approach which emphasizes man as the end of all things. They want the gifted to serve mankind and thereby make the world a better place in which to live. With this reassessment of public education it

is not out of place for us, too, to look at what we have been doing in our education of the gifted.

It is not my intention to suggest that we have failed in our instruction of the gifted. Nor am I suggesting that we view the gifted as those deserving a more prominent place within our community. It is necessary that we continue to give the gifted as well as all our children the best instruction possible.

To give covenantal instruction to the gifted it is necessary to have a foundation of Scriptural principles. Although I am particularly interested in the instruction of the gifted in this article, these principles apply to the instruction of all our children. The basis for the instruction of all our children is the covenant. The triune God has brought us and our children into a relationship of friendship and fellowship with Him in Jesus Christ our Lord. God is our God and the God of our children. He is our God in Christ with whom He has established His covenant. As such Christ is the Head of His church and of all creation. Through the work of Christ we and our children are reconciled to God and made friend-servants to serve and glorify Him. Because of this relationship the command of God comes to parents to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. As teachers who stand in

the place of parents this same command comes to us. This command must be our motivation also in the instruction of the gifted. God promises to bless God-honoring, God-fearing, and God-glorifying instruction for all our children including the gifted.

The goal of our instruction is the mature man and woman of God living in the world using their gifts and talents as God's friend-servants, loving and serving God in all their earthly life. Yet, this is not all, for this earth will pass away. We must further instruct our children to live in the new heavens and earth as kings under Christ. (See Deut. 6; Ps. 78; II Tim. 3.) The prayer in our Baptism Form emphasizes the goal of instruction. "That they live in all righteousness, under our only Teacher, King and High Priest, Jesus Christ, and that (they) may manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil and his whole dominion, to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify Thee and Thy Son Jesus Christ together with the Holy Ghost, the one only true God."

Using this basis and goal there are some important Scriptural ideas to emphasize in our instruction of the gifted. This is not to say we should not emphasize these truths in the instruction of all our children, but the gifted have particular spiritual pitfalls

which are peculiar to them. Therefore, we instruct them to seek first the kingdom of heaven. They must understand the kingdom to be the spiritual kingdom of which they are partakers by the regenerating grace of Christ. The seeking of the heavenly kingdom is a spiritual seeking in which they submit themselves to the Word of God. The seeking first of the kingdom is not a first in a list of priorities, but is a first which is foremost and always with all their gifts and abilities. Our instruction is contrary to the teaching of the world that its gifted make our world a better place to live. We must always instruct our children to be pilgrims and strangers passing through a desert wasteland warning them against pounding their tent stakes too deeply.

Another Scriptural truth which needs emphasis in our instruction is that the gifts of the gifted are given to them by God. We must never talk about the giftedness of the gifted without talking about the Maker who gave their gifts. "All that I am I owe to Thee; Thy wisdom, Lord, has fashioned me." Closely connected is God's demand of all His children to use their abilities to His service and to His glory. Yet it is more than a command, for we must lead in our instruction to a willingness of God's children to use their gifts out of gratitude and thanksgiving

for the gift of salvation.

Further, the gifted need instruction about their membership by grace in Christ's body, the church. Christ is the Head of the body, and it is the duty of its members to submit themselves to Him and use their abilities in the service of His church and for the advantage and salvation of the other members. As members of Christ's body, they are not isolated individuals able to do as they please, but all Christ's members must seek the well-being of the body. Also, to be a member of Christ's body is to take the yoke of Christ. Implied is the limiting of personal ambitions. The gifted can be very ambitious for self and are esteemed by the world as world-shakers. Natural man brushes off this yoke as impossible and grievous to be born. Our instruction will be that God's grace alone will allow the gifted to say with Christ, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." The gifted child of God will limit himself to those tasks and places where Christ's church is evident in its purest manifestation. He will limit where he gets an education for the same reason.

Further, we will instruct the gifted as members of Christ's body to be servants of Christ and of one another. In John 13:14 Jesus said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your

feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." By God's grace the gifted are given humility to be servants of Christ. Yet, as in all of us, it is but a small beginning of the new obedience. Therefore, as teachers we must nurture the gifted in this small beginning, guiding them not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Recognizing their great gifts it is easy for teachers to forget the calling to serve Christ and direct them into selfish intellectual pursuits by emphasizing the great opportunities that exist in fields of high pay and prestige. We can also encourage selfish pursuits by placing much importance on their abilities, thereby fostering intellectual pride and arrogance to the point where the gifted find the sphere of the church to be confining. Instruction in humility demands an example of humility and prayerful bringing of mutual needs before God's throne of grace. Only in this way will the student and the teacher be willing to serve Christ and His church, and the gifted will be instructed and warned by I Corinthians 1:26, 27, 29: "Ye see your calling brethren, how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise... that no flesh should glory in his presence."

We must encourage the gifted in the development and use of their abilities. This involves much effort which is not easy for the flesh. We encourage them by the care and concern we show for their efforts and abilities and by placing before them a high standard of excellence. It is also important that the other students receive the gifted as fellow saints. It is easy for those who are less gifted to mock and ridicule the gifted. Peer pressure can degrade academic excellence with the result that the gifted hate themselves and their ability and refuse to use it properly. It is important for parents and teachers to provide a proper atmosphere in the home and school for the proper exercise of intellectual ability.

Discipline is another Scriptural truth necessary in our instruction of the gifted because the gifted no less than all our children are sinful saints and, therefore, need direction in being disciples of Christ. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). Our children need the rod of discipline to give guidance and direction in learning the will of God and submitting to that will. In our day an insidious evil under the guise of good education is being promoted. It is said, "Let them be their own man." "Let them be free thinkers doing what they

use the ancient landmarks as their guideposts. We must through loving, patient, caring discipline bring them under the yoke of Christ in order that "our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as cornerstones, polished after the similitude of a palace" (Ps. 144: 12).

There is no consistent correlation between a child's intellectual capacity and his lifelong level of achievement. This does not mean that a brilliant mind and good marks in school are liabilities. It simply means that we should have the same level of love and optimism for the low achiever as we have for the high achiever. Every individual is worthwhile and should be highly treasured as a special creation of God. One child should not be more highly valued than another child.

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