

Summer 7-1-1964

## A Summary of the Traits of Mentally Superior Children and the School Programs for their Education

Ann M. Hall  
*Central Washington University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/all\\_gradpapers](https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/all_gradpapers)



Part of the [Educational Psychology Commons](#), and the [Gifted Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hall, Ann M., "A Summary of the Traits of Mentally Superior Children and the School Programs for their Education" (1964). *Graduate Student Research Papers*. 99.  
[https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/all\\_gradpapers/99](https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/all_gradpapers/99)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship and Creative Works at ScholarWorks@CWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Research Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@CWU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@cwu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@cwu.edu).

A SUMMARY OF THE TRAITS OF MENTALLY SUPERIOR CHILDREN AND  
THE SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR THEIR EDUCATION

---

A Research Paper  
Presented to  
the Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington State College

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Education

---

by  
Ann M. Hall  
July, 1964

THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING THE  
PLAN 2 REQUIREMENT FOR THE COMPLETION  
OF A RESEARCH PAPER.

---

Arley L. Vancil  
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Statement of the Problem . . . . .	1
Importance of the Study . . . . .	1
Definitions of the Terms Used . . . . .	2
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE. . . . .	3
CHAPTER III. TRAITS . . . . .	6
Physical Traits of the Mentally Superior. . . . .	6
Intellectual Traits of the Mentally Superior . . . . .	7
Social Traits of the Mentally Superior. . . . .	9
Personality Traits of the Mentally Superior . . . . .	11
CHAPTER IV. SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR THE MENTALLY SUPERIOR . . . . .	14
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION . . . . .	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY	

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This paper is an attempt (1) to enumerate some of the physical, social, intellectual, and personality traits of the mentally superior child with the hope that it might help the classroom teacher to understand him as a whole person; (2) to trace the highlights in the development of the research on the mentally superior child through the review of the literature; and (3) to summarize and describe some of the educational programs that have been set up to meet the educational needs of the mentally superior child.

#### II. IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

It is easy to agree that one of America's greatest resources is her mentally superior children, but it is far more difficult to identify these children in the classroom, and then, having identified them, to help them to realize their capacity. Often it is sobering to the teacher to know that he must teach the student whose general intellectual ability exceeds his own. Understanding this child and preparing for his education can alleviate the teacher's consternation.

## III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Mentally superior child. A child who has high general intellectual ability is designated as a mentally superior child. He may or may not have special ability such as musical talent, etc. Usually 130 I.Q. (Stanford-Binet) is the cut-off point most frequently used for setting up special classes for bright children, but some administrators lower it to 120 I.Q., and some even lower it to 115 I.Q. and 110 I.Q.

Gifted child. This term is synonymous with mentally superior child.

## CHAPTER II

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Down through the ages men have been concerned with the utilization of the gifted person's talents. Cutts and Mosely point out some interesting historical references to the education of the talented. (7:237) Socrates reasoned that civilization depended upon the education of all but advocated the especial education of the intelligent. Plato referred to education as the "one sufficient thing" but assigned the intelligent to the guardianship of his Republic. Sir Thomas More's Utopian scholars were revered men with "a fine wit, a unique ability, and a mind apt to good learning."

From our own history is lifted this statement of Thomas Jefferson: "The general objectives are to provide an education adapted to the years, to the capacity, and the condition of everyone, and directed to their freedom and happiness. We hope to avail the state of those talents which nature has sown as liberally among the poor as the rich, but perish without use, if not sought for and cultivated."

These are, of course, classic references. Many, many more could be found. They all state the ideal, but it has only been within the last century that educators have made any progress toward the identification of these "guardians of the Republic," with a "fine wit" and "unique ability" whose talents "perish without use if not sought for."

Perusing Exceptional Children, NEA Journal, and other educational periodicals, one finds that the vast majority of written material is still

slanted toward the mentally inferior rather than the mentally superior. One school psychologist expressed a sincere disappointment in the fact that schools seem to use the services of the school psychologist for the identification of the mentally inferior pupil while screening for special education programs. Probably one of the reasons for this is the fact that the mentally inferior child is much easier for the teacher to spot, both physically and intellectually.

This is an echo of the disappointment felt by Leta Hollingworth in 1926 at the lack of public interest in the bright child while voluminous literature had been written and much money had been spent on "the feeble-minded, the delinquent, the crippled, the insane, and others who varied biologically in the direction of social incompetence." (12:vii)

Most researchers in the field of the gifted child give Sir Francis Galton the honor of being the first to call attention to the gifted with the advent of his book Hereditary Genius.

In the first two decades of this century J. McKeen Cattell and Lewis M. Terman began their genetic studies of prominent men and gifted children. The advent of the intelligence test about this time afforded researchers the instrument which they needed to continue their work.

In 1926 Leta S. Hollingworth published her Gifted Children, Their Nature and Nurture which might well be called the first textbook on the study of gifted children.

In 1940 Herbert A. Carroll published his Genius in the Making and Terman followed up his earlier studies in 1947 with his The Gifted Child Grows Up. By this time public interest was thoroughly aroused and



preparation for providing the gifted child with a better education within the public school system was initiated.

It was Paul Witty who broadened the concept of the gifted to include the specially talented children, and realizing that gifted children of what he called the first order--those with an I.Q. somewhere over 150 by the Stanford-Binet--were rare, he advocated the inclusion of children with 120 I.Q. for special classes.

Florence Goodenough continued work in the description and identification of the gifted while Robert J. Havighurst, Robert F. DeHaan, D.A. Worcester, and others advanced public school programs for the special education of gifted children.

These, of course, are not all the names that loom large in the field of identifying and providing programs for the mentally superior child, but much of which is written today radiates from the foundations laid by these gifted people.

## CHAPTER III

## PHYSICAL TRAITS OF THE MENTALLY SUPERIOR

The belief that the very bright child is a physical weakling is still prevalent. He is often caricatured as a monstrosity with thin legs and a very large head on which rest very large glasses. This is far from true. Actual measurement to show size and strength of the intellectually eminent as compared to the average seldom has been taken, but Carroll finds that mentally superior children were taller and heavier than average children. (5:60-2) Lewis Terman found that physical superiority started at birth. His findings showed that the mentally superior child weighed  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a pound more at birth. (19:572)

Leta Hollingworth states that the standing height of children testing above 135 I.Q. as studied by herself, Baldwin, Terman, and Taylor had a median height of 52.9 inches as compared to the median of 51.2 inches for children of average intelligence and 49.6 inches for the mentally inferior children. (12:84-7)

There is also evidence that the mentally superior child's maturation rate is speeded up slightly. The age of pubescence in highly intelligent children is advanced in development about six months. (13:238)

Florence Goodenough states that, on the whole, exhaustive medical examinations prove that the mentally superior children were more advanced

in their physical development and health habits than average children.

(11:73-5)

#### INTELLECTUAL TRAITS OF THE MENTALLY SUPERIOR

Most psychologists place the line of demarcation for the mentally superior at 130 I.Q. on the Stanford-Binet. Other tests can be used and the examiner must know the test from which he received his score. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for children has a ceiling of 154, while the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test has 150 as its highest norm score, and the Stanford-Binet Test goes up to 200. The Otis Quick-Scoring Mental Test, a group test, is also widely used as a screening device for the mentally superior child. Sometimes the only method of recognition, though, is teacher observations which can be fallible. Items which call for "abstract thinking" and "verbal reasoning" are usually the type of items used to compute intellectual capacity.

Many gifted children identify themselves early by performing such tasks as reading at an early age. Many work far above grade level in many or all school subjects. For these testing is only a matter of verification. Finding the child who is an underachiever presents the educator with the real problem. Since it is estimated that only two to four per cent of the population is endowed with an I.Q. of 130 and above (the percentage increases if the cut-off point is lowered, e.g., D. A. Worcester estimates that 16 per cent of our population has 115 I.Q. or above) it stands to reason that it is very important to find the underachiever as well as verify the ones who are achieving to capacity.

The American Association for Gifted Children defines the academically-gifted child as a person whose performance in any line of socially useful endeavor is consistently superior. The Educational Policies Commission suggests that pupils with I.Q.'s of 137 and above be termed highly gifted and that those with I.Q.'s of 120 to 137 be identified as moderately gifted.

DeHaan and Havighurst propose the selecting of gifted children from the top 10 per cent of their age group in one or more areas of talent, general intellectual ability, ability in science, mechanics, leadership, human relations, creative arts, music, creative writing, and dramatics. They claim any child is superior who can make an outstanding contribution to the welfare of or the quality of living of the public. (8;1-3)

Intelligence test scores seem to be the most valid single criterion for judging giftedness. In the state of California some school districts initiate programs for children with I.Q.'s beginning from 110. Cut-off points vary according to the percentage of gifted children in the school district. Thus in high socio-economic areas which yield more children with high I.Q.'s the cut-off point may be high, at 130 or above, but in low socio-economic areas which may yield fewer children with high I.Q.'s the cut-off point may be as low as 110 I.Q. This is the difficulty of deciding at just what point giftedness starts.

An effective screening device then becomes a necessity. Robert Havighurst and Robert DeHaan have set up the following as a screening guide for schools:

- (1) Inclusive. A good screening program will include every child and will attempt to discover a number of different kinds of talent.

- (2) Systematic. This will use a wide variety of carefully chosen tests and instruments. It will record test results and observations regularly and accurately throughout a child's school career.
- (3) Efficient. The screening program will identify gifted children with the minimal expenditure of effort by teachers and administrators. The testing and observing will be distributed among all the teachers.
- (4) Flexible. This will be flexible in order to fit in the particular objectives of the local educational program for gifted children. (8:57)

One might say that the gifted child has chosen his parents well. From them he inherits a stronger and larger body and a keener and more alert mind. On the whole his parents are above average in intelligence, above average in socio-economic status, have a better than average education, feed and clothe him better, and are better able to direct his education. Of course the fallacy here lies in the fact that gifted children from lower socio-economic status and less intelligent parents are sometimes never discovered.

#### SOCIAL TRAITS OF THE MENTALLY SUPERIOR

The brilliant child who tries in vain to interest his companions his own age in his own intellectual interests may find himself outside the circle, and if he finds himself not accepted by the older children in whose games he is more interested, he again finds himself outside the circle. To compound his confusion over-solicitous parents, knowing that he is superior in intelligence to other children, may unwisely insist that he perform for their friends. In addition the gifted child, to complicate

his social position, may avoid the vigorous and competitive forms of sports which carry much social prestige for a more intellectual pursuit.

Although these children have the high degree of abstract thinking, the ability for logical argument, and the reasoning and cognitive abilities and ability to generalize, which make good leaders, they are seldom accepted as social leaders. Leta Hollingworth notes that when a group picks a leader it will choose one which is superior to itself but not too superior. Terman found a slight tendency for these children to be avoided by others of their age group, and also a slight tendency for the bright child to prefer to be alone. However, Terman considers these tendencies of less importance than educators usually consider them.

In spite of these social odds it is interesting to note that Herbert Carroll finds that the genius is very rarely antisocial. On the whole the case of the juvenile delinquent among superiorly intelligent children is a very rare thing. It would seem that the gifted adjusts socially very satisfactorily in spite of the odds because he satisfies himself with mental activity more than an average individual does.

Florence Goodenough notes that bright children have a better understanding for the rules of society and are able to see the need for them. They rate higher also in social interests than the average children. When rated by teachers for the Stanford investigation on such traits as (1) fondness for large groups, (2) leadership, (3) popularity with other children, (4) sensitiveness to approval and disapproval, (5) freedom from vanity and sensitiveness, the brighter children were rated higher. (11:95)

Although it appears that the bright child is very often able to handle his own social adjustment satisfactorily, the classroom teacher should be on the look out for any trouble which might arise from aggressive attitudes or recessive attitudes which denote values different from those of the peer group. If the teacher has trouble motivating this bright child, he should ask the help of the school psychologist or counselor. This presents a problem for the teacher because there are no well-defined tests for social and personality growth as there are for physical and intellectual growth.

#### PERSONALITY TRAITS OF THE MENTALLY SUPERIOR

The superior child sees himself usually in a very modest light. Goodenough states that in knowing that there is so much to know he does not usually over-rate himself. The child whose parents exploit his exceptional gift may present a different picture. He, however, is not the rule. In addition to his modesty the mentally superior child has an awareness that, in some way, he is different, which is a threat to his desire to belong to a group. It is this conflict that has often haunted the brilliant throughout their life as shown from the studies of Terman and Hollingworth. The greater the deviation from the norm the stronger the conflict becomes.

On the whole the self-concept of the bright is probably too modest. He finds school too easy, he reads well, is zestful in his interests, and

is capable of success in one or more lines of endeavor. He acquires skills easily and quickly. Terman found that he usually is free from dishonesty, selfishness, and disobedience.

He is less neurotic, is more independent, is less likely to cheat and more likely to accept responsibility. Some studies have found a flaw in the personality make-up of the gifted child. They claim he is likely to be indolent and lazy in school. These studies, however, have been discredited with the explanation that the curriculum of the school do not afford the bright child enough interest.

Carroll claims that sometimes a mentally superior child, unable to capture the attention of his peers, wraps himself in day-dreams, and imaginary companions which, if carried into adulthood, may result in paranoia, a psychosis which is more frequently found among the mentally superior. (5:104)

Catherine Cox, in her study of eminent individuals, finds that eminence and forcefulness or strength of character, persistence of motive, dynamic vigor of character and an innate assurance of superior ability go hand in hand.

In his recent study of the personal and social adjustment of gifted adolescents, Donald Smith finds that in the area of independent-dominant, unity of personality, self-acceptance, responsible-cooperative, and moderation of interpersonal behavior as rated by superior students, average students, and their teachers, the superior students do not differ



greatly in their positive adjustment. (18:65) In contrast to this study the earlier studies on personality traits of the gifted seems a little idealistic.

With the improvement of personality tests on structural basis, more and more studies will be published, but at present most of the studies are the case study variety with the emphasis on personality traits as described by individuals rather than personality structure.

There is evidence that intelligence plays a major part in personality adjustment as John E. Anderson states: "We were surprised at the emergence of the intelligence "G" factor in a variety of our instruments (family attitude, responsibility, maturity, adjustment) in spite of our attempts to minimize intelligence in selecting the personality measures." (1:64) With more precise instruments for testing personality the picture of the personality of the mentally superior child will come into focus. With the evidence now present it is safe to assume that the personality picture of the mentally superior will be favorable.

For the classroom teacher the main problem lies with the under-achiever. It is he who exhibits a negative attitude toward school. It is he who is the most difficult to identify, and the longer he goes undiscovered the more acute becomes his maladjustment. He goes from elementary school into secondary school more hostile toward the teacher and the school because he is aware of his underachievement. From there he passes into life intellectually unfulfilled, socially maladjusted, and personally unhappy with his meager achievement.

## CHAPTER IV

## SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR THE MENTALLY SUPERIOR

D. A. Worcester states that society is becoming increasingly aware of the problem of conservation of talent. He points to Terman's study of 1400 persons who in childhood made very high scores on mental tests but who have not made the contributions to society which was expected of them. A large number of those of the high capacity did not even secure educational training beyond high school. (21:1-4)

It might be interesting to speculate on the reasons for this. Perhaps our society and schools which are keyed to the needs of the average emphasize values different from those held by the mentally superior, who, being the smaller segment of society, accept and adjust.

After public interest was aroused in the education of the mentally superior child, the question arose: How can the public school system provide for him?

In 1945 Charles Scott Berry wrote a short bulletin on educating gifted children, and much of what has been written since seems to be a recapitulation or enlargement of his basic suggestions.

The three ways most often considered for providing for these mentally superior children within the frame of the public school system are (1) enrichment of the program, (2) acceleration, and (3) segregation.

Enrichment is interpreted by most writers as an extension of the school subject to include creative and experimental experiences for the

child. He may be directed into independent work and investigation and encouraged to do extensive reading beyond that required of the average student. DeHaan and Havighurst explain that "enrichment is based on the principle that for maximum learning to take place, the educational environment must set learning tasks that are slightly more complex and advanced than those the individual has already known." (8:97) Enrichment can also take place in a related manner by extending the subject into other fields such as art, music, writing, etc. Pamphlets of activities such as Suggested Enrichment Activities for the Gifted Child published by the Office of the Superintendent of Schools of California furnish the classroom teacher with many useful ideas and projects for enriching a program. DeHaan and Havighurst point out that this type of classroom enrichment is the least controversial method of providing for the gifted child and probably the easiest for the teacher to inaugurate. Its main danger lies in the possibility of its deteriorating into busy work for both teacher and pupil.

If enrichment seems inadequate for the child's talents, then sometimes acceleration is the answer.

Acceleration can take place in several different ways. The most common of these is the skipping of grades. Because of difficult social adjustment and physical maturation patterns, many psychologists do not recommend acceleration. There have been cases of children of first-order intelligence (above 140 I.Q.) when the skipping of grades has been the only answer. A more acceptable form of acceleration is the early entrance

in school. D. A. Worcester noted that in the Nebraska studies where children were entered in school early on evidence of high scores on intelligence tests they adjusted well emotionally and were usually above average in academic performance. He also states that "when a child is ready to go now, to stay out of school may result in maladjustment." (21:21)

Acceleration can be accomplished by establishing groups within the room and letting students advance from group to group. The ungraded school is probably the most dramatic innovation for taking care of all individual differences, permitting the child to make as rapid a progress as possible. In secondary schools acceleration takes the form of permitting the student to take added and more difficult subjects.

The main difficulty of acceleration lies in the possibility of the child's not acquiring the basic skills.

The third method is segregation or special grouping. This often takes the form of a club for special interest. Special groups for reading, science, mathematics, etc. are established within the regular school structure. Selections of students for these special classes are usually based on (1) intelligence score, (2) achievement test, and (3) teachers' judgment. It is interesting to note that Hollingworth favored segregation and Scott in his booklet states that the gifted child favors this because it gives him keener competition.

In its booklet The Gifted Child: Another Look, the California Elementary School Administrators' Association states that the negative view of special education for the gifted is expressed by some educators

who "believe that no special instructional plans are necessary for the gifted. . .and it is undemocratic to give special attention to gifted children." (4:7)

A program has been formulated by the Cooperative Program for Students of Exceptional Endowment which, if it could be executed, would come close to reaching the ideal. Its essential features are as follows:

- (1) Provision for many kinds of unusual ability so that the traits and talents for identification and for development shall not be limited to general intelligence as currently tested but shall include creative, intellectual, artistic, and social capacities and the emotional and moral qualities necessary for effective use of these capacities.
- (2) Experimentation with the methods and materials of instruction for groups and individuals that will challenge and develop unusual abilities of various kinds, and to this end the encouragement and training of good teachers.
- (3) Coordination of the teaching and the programs of promising students with the common curriculum of the schools and with other educational resources in the community to avoid fixed groupings with the intentions of enabling other students to profit from the experimentation.
- (4) Cooperation with colleges for following up students from the program.
- (5) Close collaboration with the college in a strategic position for assisting in shaping and evaluating the program.  
(17:1)

It states that the success of such a program will be measured in terms of its acceptance by pupils, parents, teachers, and administrators, in terms of the support shown for making such improvements and for incorporating these into regular school practice.

## CONCLUSION

Research suggests that a definite pattern of development different in degree from that of the average child is apparent in the mentally superior child, and the classroom teacher can acquaint himself with this general developmental pattern. It cannot be applied rigidly, of course, because an exception to the pattern may occur at any time. However the classroom teacher who acquaints himself with the general developmental pattern and traits of the mentally superior child is better prepared to teach him. The teacher also should recognize that the child is an individual, not a type, and that he is entitled to realize his maximum potential and has the unalienable right to the pursuit of happiness, regardless of society's need for his talents. The teacher should help the child to develop his own interests and give him the guidance he needs to reach maturity.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Anderson, John E. "The Prediction of Adjustment Over Time." Personality Development in Children. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960.
2. Ausubel, David P. Theory and Problems of Adolescent Development. New York: Grune & Stratton, 1954.
3. Berry, Charles Scott. The Education of Gifted Children. Columbus: Ohio State University, 1945.
4. California Elementary School Administrators' Association for Gifted Children. The Gifted Child: Another Look. n. p. n. d.
5. Carroll, Herbert A. Genius in the Making. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1940.
6. Copley, Frank O. The American High School and the Talented Student. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961.
7. Cutts, Norma E., and Nicholas Moseley. Teaching the Bright and Gifted. Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1957.
8. DeHaan, Robert F., and Robert J. Havighurst. Educating Gifted Children. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
9. Gallagher, James J. The Gifted Child in the Elementary Schools. Washington, D.C.: Classroom Teachers American Education Research Association of the National Education Association, 1959.
10. Galton, Francis. Hereditary Genius. London: Macmillan, 1869.
11. Goodenough, Florence L. Exceptional Children. New York: Appleton-Century, Crofts, Inc., 1956.
12. Hollingworth, Leta S. Gifted Children Their Nature and Nurture. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926.
13. Merry, Frieda Kiefer, and Ralph Vickers Merry. The First Two Decades of Life. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950.
14. Mussen, Paul Henry, and John Janeway Conger. Child Development and Personality. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956.



15. National Society for the Study of Education. Education for the Gifted. The Fifty-seventh Yearbook. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
16. Office of the Superintendent of Schools. Suggested Enrichment Activities for the Gifted Child. San Diego, November, 1954.
17. Portland Public Schools, A Report Summarizing Four Years of Progress, March, 1957.
18. Terman, Lewis M., Mental and Physical Traits of a Thousand Children. (Vol. I of Genetic Studies of Genius. 3 vols. Stanford University Press, 1926), p. 572.
19. Terman, Lewis M., et al. Genetic Studies of Genius. Vol. I. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1926.
20. Terman, Lewis M., and Melita H. Oden. The Gifted Child Grows Up. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1947.
21. Worcester, D. A. The Education of Children of Above-Average Mentality. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1956.
22. Witty, Paul, ed. The Gifted Child. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1951.