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Review of Excellence and Equality: A Qualitatively Different Perspective on Gifted and Talented Education

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Media Themes and Threads

Carolyn Callahan, Editor

Fetterman, D. M. (1988). *Excellence and equality: A qualitatively different perspective on gifted and talented education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

With President Bush's *America 2000* strategy for American educational superiority coupled with strong moves away from ability grouping practices, we are reminded of the tension existing in American schools between promoting excellence in our students and providing equal educational opportunity for all learners. On the one hand we are asked to make sure the talents of the best and brightest are fully developed to keep America competitive on the global market, while on the other hand we are asked not to single out high achieving students for grouped treatment.

Professor David Fetterman has written *Excellence and Equality: A Qualitatively Different Perspective on Gifted and Talented Education* in order to confront the tension between excellence and equality as it exists in gifted and talented programs. The perspective he provides is qualitatively different (an admitted play on the familiar gifted education phrase) in at least three ways. Foremost, Fetterman bases his writing on insights gained from the operational successes and failures of the numerous gifted programs he has evaluated at local and state levels. Second, he writes from an anthropological view that imbeds the gifted programs in their cultural context and elicits national concerns for issues raised at the local and state level. Finally, he provides an international view of programs that permits a cross-cultural analysis of the excellence-equity dichotomy.

The stated audience for the book is scholars, educators, evaluators, legislators, the general public, and other anthropologists. However, the primary target seems to be policy makers, particularly at the national level—given the specific policy recommendations given in the final chapter.

The book begins with a chapter that defines the excellence-equality debate, addresses some myths about gifted students, and provides an overview of the remainder of the volume. The basic premise of the chapter is that gifted education should be given high priority by national policy makers.

Chapters 2 through 4 provide information about Fetterman's evaluation of the California GATE program. These chapters provide

excellent discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of various programming approaches in gifted education, particularly in the case studies that provide examples of the benefits and pitfalls of actual gifted programs. There is excellent discussion of grading practices related to gifted education, as well as discussion of issues not often raised in gifted programs—including the lack of theory, political associations, and cheating.

Chapter 5 describes an evaluation conducted in the schools of Peoria, Illinois, which resulted from conflict between Peoria schools and the state over the low enrollment of minorities in the gifted program. The chapter describes the program and identification procedures, but couches these in the community context—making apparent the connection between problems in the community and problems in the classroom. For the evaluator, this chapter presents an excellent case of evaluation as a political activity. For the program administrator, the chapter provides concrete suggestions for dealing with the low minority enrollment issue.

Chapter 6 describes gifted programs in countries around the globe, including Australia, West Germany, the Soviet Union, England, Canada, Israel, Japan, and China. The chapter shows that the struggle between equity and excellence exists throughout the world, but has varying effects on the development of programs. One disappointment in this chapter was that all major regions of the world were represented except Africa. In a book dealing with equality, this seems a significant omission.

The final chapter provides guidance for developing excellent gifted programs. It presents five elements seen as essential to the success of the process of gifted education; quality, commitment, leadership, diversity of curriculum and instruction, and a whole-person approach. Finally, it proposes two ideas to national policy makers—a national research center and a nation school—that Fetterman says are needed to revitalize gifted education.

In general, I found the book to be good reading. It is written in an approachable style that includes numerous quotes from gifted practitioners, students, and parents. These quotes give particular life to the issues raised. Fetterman does a good job of balancing discussion of the strengths of gifted programs with troublesome issues such as low minority enrollment.

The book refers to several philosophical arguments defending the existence of gifted programs; including the loss of human potential, the maintenance of international competitiveness, and the focus on meeting individual needs. However, the presentation of these

arguments seldom goes beyond basic rhetorical statements, and the connection between these arguments and the data presented in the chapters is not apparent.

There is, however, one exception to this lack of connection. One philosophical argument presented throughout is that gifted education can serve as a model for improving regular education. The pre-eminence given this argument seems troubling in a text that deals with elitism and egalitarianism. Certainly input from gifted educators into the current educational reform movement is needed and probably welcome, but to propose that we serve as a model for the reform may smack of the elitism that regular education does not welcome.

Nonetheless, I believe this book is important reading for gifted educators and educational policy makers. The book successfully builds a case for making gifted education a national priority and provides specific recommendations for how that national priority might be carried into action. Indeed, one of the book's recommendations—the establishment of a national research center on gifted education—has been realized.

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Elchoness, M. (1992). *Why do kids need feelings? A guide to healthy emotions*. Ventura, CA: Monroe. 93 pp.

Elchoness, M. (1992). *Why do kids need feelings? Parent/teacher guide*. Ventura, CA: Monroe. 39 pp.

Self-help books on recovery or healing from dysfunctional families have exploded on the market for adults. While the children's market has not blossomed as fully, it was only a matter of time before such ideas infiltrated the children's market. Monte Elchoness has provided his version of mental health in his two books.

Monte Elchoness writes both books to fill an "educational void" dealing with the expression of feelings. The goal of *Why Do Kids Need Feelings?* is to "communicate the importance and value of experiencing and expressing feelings." The *Parent/Teacher Guide* acts as a companion volume to *Why Do Kids Need Feelings?* to assist parents and teachers in expanding children's understanding of emotions. The *Parent/Teacher Guide* is geared for an audience of parents,

teachers, or counselors. The student edition does not identify an appropriate age/grade/reading level. From the illustrations, the child in the story seems to be between 8 and 12 years old. However, the interest and reading level appear to be about the third grade level. A section for parents is included at the end of the student edition.

In *Why Do Kids Need Feelings?* Elchoness uses the journey archetype to assist the protagonist, Daniel, in understanding the importance of feelings. Daniel is accompanied by his guitar-strumming, dude-relating, Ringo look-alike, inner guide, Noitome (yes, that is emotion spelled backward). Noitome appears when Daniel who is rendered frightened and blue from a thunderstorm asks his baby sister in frustration, "Do you ever wonder about feelings and why kids like us need to have them, especially the bad feelings?" Noitome and Daniel journey through an altered space and time to a circus to learn from a juggler how to juggle anger and from the sad clown how to deal with sadness. Next their journey takes them to a world without feelings where Daniel sees his family unable to express any positive or negative feelings. Like Scrooge, Daniel begs to be taken home, but not before Noitome drops Daniel in his circle of comfort surrounded by the feeling stoppers (fear). Daniel breaks through his fear to return home to his family with his newly learned lessons and bubbling over with joy as to why feelings are necessary, vowing to express his feelings forever. The section at the end for parents addresses the importance of having feelings, helping children, spending quality time with children, and examining powerful feelings.

The *Parent/Teacher Guide* is divided into three parts. Section one deals with general information about feelings. Section two is divided by chapter according to the student guide. In each chapter are questions pertaining to the story. Most of the questions are on the knowledge, comprehension, or application level with responses following each question. In many of the chapters, there is at least one question asking the student to relate Daniel's experience to his or her own. For these questions, Elchoness suggests how to focus the discussion for children. The third section acts as a summary and reinforcement of the previous discussions.

The problems with this book are numerous. To begin with, Elchoness tells adults it is necessary to set the tone for this program. Yet the only suggestion he offers for doing this is for the adult to be willing to be a sharing part of this group. Specific suggestions for structuring discussions and explanations of these suggestions are needed. Elchoness cautions that this book should not be used as a therapy program. However, he structures several questions where the depth