

A LOOK BACK AT ...

EDUCATIONAL NON-ACCELERATION AN INTERNATIONAL TRAGEDY

by Julian C. Stanley

In 1977 Dr. Stanley addressed the Second World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children at the University of San Francisco. His topic, educational non-acceleration, was of interest to our readers and was developed into an article for G/C/T (the former title of The Gifted Child Today) in 1978. This article reviews events subsequent to Dr. Stanley's speech.

Over the years since its founding in 1971, the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY) at Johns Hopkins University has gone from strongly pushing acceleration in grade placement ("grade skipping") to urging that special, supplemental educational opportunities be provided youths who reason exceptionally well mathematically. When the speech on which the paper is based was given in 1977, SMPY was the only project of its kind in the country, except for some special work at the University of Washington in Seattle, in the St. Paul/Minneapolis area, and in the State of Illinois — all three of which grew out of SMPY's early efforts. SMPY held an annual talent search in which its staff

administered the College Board Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and scored it. Also, it conducted special, accelerated mathematics classes summer and winter and published a newsletter ten times per year.

The operational burdens of SMPY became increasingly onerous for its small staff, so in 1979 I went to Johns Hopkins' President Steven Muller and asked that a unit independent of SMPY be created on campus to conduct talent searches and provide special classes. This was done almost immediately, and resulted in the Office of Talent Identification and Development (OTID), now called the Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY). That was an immediate success. CTY continues its ever-increasing sphere of influence, from Virginia to Maine plus Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, and several foreign countries. Under its auspices some 30,000 students, mostly seventh graders aged 12, take the SAT each January. Also, approximately 3,200 three-week enrollees take accelerated academic courses conducted each summer by CTY on four college campuses from Pennsylvania to California.

By 1979, Arizona State University had followed the SMPY and OTID model by establishing on its campus the Project for the Study of Academic Precocity (PSAP). This had been preceded by a local effort in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and was followed by centers at Duke University, Northwestern University, the University of Denver, the University of Washington (Seattle), Iowa State University, and Sacramento State University. Every able youth in the fifty states gained access to an annual talent search involving SAT, and to a diversity of special, fast-paced academic courses, especially residential ones offered during summers. Every unit of this remarkable network of independent centers continues to thrive. More than 100,000 seventh and eighth graders each year take the SAT whereas when SMPY began in 1971 it was probably possible to count the number doing so without exhausting the fingers of both hands.

It may be worthwhile to note here that the four largest centers are located at private universities (Denver, Duke, Johns Hopkins, and Northwestern) and are supported largely by private

funds, especially fees collected from the students who participate in annual talent searches and the residential summer programs. Unfortunately, this private grass-roots movement does not seem to have affected public or private secondary education to the extent that school systems would set up free or inexpensive supplemental academic programs along the lines pioneered by SMPY from 1972 onward. Curricular flexibility has improved, however. Also colleges and universities across the land have become much more responsible to the special needs of youths who reason exceptionally well mathematically and/or verbally. These developments have benefited chiefly the children of financially affluent or educationally highly oriented parents.

Two levels of talent have been set up. For mathematical reasoning ability, a score of 500 or more on the SAT-M before age 13 defines about the top 1 percent of 12 year olds. A score of 700-800 before age 13 defines approximately the top one-hundredth of 1 percent of 12 year olds (that is, the top 1 in 10,000). The centers concentrate on the 500-800M group, whereas SMPY devotes its identification and facilitation efforts to the 700-800M group of boys and girls and also to the 640-690M group of girls, the latter in order to find more females to assist.

For verbal reasoning ability the corresponding scores are at least 430 on SAT-V and, for the top group, at least 630V. SMPY itself does not work directly with youths whose scores are less than 640M, but of course a number of its proteges score high on both M and V (see Stanley, 1988, and Lupkowski & Stanley, 1988). Probably the best discussion of SMPY's rationale is contained in Stanley and Benbow (1986).

Nowadays, SMPY concentrates on informing the members of its "700-800" on SAT-M Before Age 13 Group" and 640-690 on SAT-M Before Age 13 Group" (girls only) about educational opportunities that will greatly supplement the curricula of even the best public or private junior or senior high schools. Also, those in college are offered suggestions for improving their education during the undergraduate and graduate years. Much of this informing, motivating, and providing appropriate role models is done via the two newsletters that SMPY issues, a quarterly (about 20 single-spaced pages

per issue) for precollege students and one twice per year for those beyond high school. In addition, SMPY handles much correspondence from parents of math-talented youths around the world (e.g., there is a branch of SMPY at Tianjin, People's Republic of China, and one at Iowa State University), does much educational counseling by telephone, conducts some workshops for students and their parents, and disseminates much material about educating youths who reason extremely well mathematically even as young as age 4 or 5.

SMPY will help educators anywhere conduct a search for mathematically apt young students, using a form of SAT-M translated into their language. In

In particular, ways must be found to make the classes less expensive so that they will be available to more of the high-scoring participants in the talent searches. At present, the cost of three residential summer weeks varies from \$750 at the Challenge for Youth — Talented and Gifted (CY-TAG) of Iowa State University, Ames, to about \$1,500 in some other centers. Scholarships for students who require financial aid are sorely needed. Even more helpful would be willingness of school systems to pay the costs for their most intellectually promising students or to set up special academic classes, preferably residential ones. The educational, social, and emotional benefits would be enormous.



Male members of SMPY's 700-800 on SAT before age 13 group pose with Dr. Julian Stanley.

this way it has located 151 youths in China who scored at least 700 on SAT-M before age 13. They are being trained there to participate in international mathematics, chemistry, and physics competitions. In these China is already earning an enviable reputation.

If I were rewriting that 1977 speech, of course I'd phrase it rather differently. Nevertheless, the emphasis on providing a smorgasbord of special, accelerative educational opportunities appears to have been validated since then. The key concepts seem to me to be curricular flexibility, special academic classes, and proper articulation of out-of-school academic experiences with in-school ones.

References

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