

# A Great Man Standing With Terman and Hollingworth

## Julian C. Stanley (1918–2005)

My interest in talent began by chance. I was an undergraduate, having recently arrived from Europe and a European academic family, in my first day of class in 1976 with Julian C. Stanley. In front of me was a lanky man, wearing double-knit pants (due to their convenience), who spoke with a deep Southern accent. He was a great scholar who spoke passionately about gifted children and what they could accomplish if given the chance. I was amazed. What I saw, I realized many years later, was the epitome of the American contribution to the academic role, the practical use of knowledge for the betterment of society. He became my professional father.

Julian Stanley grew up outside of Atlanta in humble surroundings, bright and extremely tall for his age. He went to junior college, became a chemistry teacher at age 19, and then joined the Army Air Corps chemical warfare division during World War II. He often wondered what would have happened to him had World War II not intervened. The boredom of being stationed in Algeria cured him of his intellectual laziness, he said. When he returned home from the war, with his GI benefits in tow, he was raring to go, like a racehorse about to be released from the gates for the big race. He went to Harvard, earning his Ed.D., and from there moved to Peabody College to assume his first academic post, along the way getting married and having a daughter. He was at Peabody College, now of Vanderbilt University, for 4 years, “working like a dog,” as he put it.

His next stop was the University of Wisconsin, where he became famous for his work in experimental design and psychometrics. There, he formed the Lab for Experimental Design, which attracted such students as Gene Glass, Andy Porter, and Carl Bereiter. (He was already busy identifying talent then, foreshadowing his later interest.) He coauthored, via a long-distance collaboration with Don Campbell, the famous *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), which is now required reading of all graduate students in education and psychology. If anything is a classic, it is.

In the late 1960s, he moved to Johns Hopkins University with a tremendous reputation and a long

scholarly record. There, he finished out his career, working regularly until one week before his death at age 87. One project that he undertook at that time was to write a chapter on reliability in Thorndike’s (1971) *Educational Measurement*. It was a *tour de force* but, as he often remarked, resulted in him becoming sick and tired of “dry-bone methodology.” He wanted to work with people, to make a difference. This desire primed him for his next and most successful career at age 53.

With a grant from the newly formed Spencer Foundation and experience working with two extremely bright boys, he formed the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY) in 1971. He developed the concept of a talent search, piloting his concept in 1972 with 450 seventh and eighth graders in the Greater Baltimore area. As part of this talent search, he administered the College Board SAT, normally given to 11th and 12th graders. It was a shocking experiment, not only because it worked extremely well in identifying talent and developing the concept of out-of-level testing, but also because the idea, once demonstrated successfully, spread like wildfire. Now, several million youth across the country have participated in talent searches sponsored by Johns Hopkins, Duke University, Northwestern University, University of Iowa, and the University of Denver. The talent search has become a rite of passage for talented youth. Its power was not just in its sheer effectiveness in finding talent, but in its recognition power—making students comprehend what precious talents they had and how they ought to develop them. It also led Julian Stanley to develop further programs for talented youth, as he thought it was irresponsible to simply identify talent without providing facilitation.

Inspired by Browning’s famous lines, “Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, Or what’s a heaven for?,” Julian began drawing upon educational acceleration as the guiding philosophy for his programs for talented youth. He formed fast-paced mathematics classes, followed by similar classes in science, and then his peers extended them to the humanities. He had students enter college early and radically accelerate. He promoted the

use of AP classes, the taking of college courses while still in high school, and skipping grades. Talented students were now exposed to a smorgasbord of accelerative options. In 1971, these ideas were heretical and just as shocking as giving the SAT to 12-year-olds, but Julian Stanley was undeterred, fully convinced by the scientific evidence then available that acceleration would be the most effective approach to serving highly gifted students. (He turned out to be right, of course.)

Calling his approach “benignly insidious,” he worked with schools to make special exceptions for his protégés. And, they would; consequently, the ideas germinated, took hold, and spread in schools. Thereby, he affected even greater positive change. Schools came to adopt more AP courses, younger kids were allowed to take them (no need to wait until 12th grade), and kids were heading to their local colleges and universities to take classes that were unavailable in their schools under postsecondary enrollment laws. The fast-paced summer and academic year classes he pioneered were later incorporated by talent search programs at multiple universities, serving thousands annually.

In 1980, Julian began his pet project, working with students who scored at least 700 on the SAT-Math before

age 13 (top 1 in 10,000), which later expanded to students with similar scores on the SAT-Verbal. Julian spent countless hours working with these students one-on-one, developing a consuming passion that sustained him in later years leading to the formation of the Study of Exceptional Talent, renamed the Julian C. Stanley Study of Exceptional Talent this past June, at Johns Hopkins’ Center for Talented Youth (CTY). The SMPY is continued at Vanderbilt University by David Lubinski and myself, dedicated to completing the 50-year longitudinal study of intellectual talent with 5,000 individuals who are now approaching mid-life. Thus, we will continue to learn much about talent development for many years to come and students will still be nurtured individually.

The educational landscape for talented youth in America has been forever changed because one talented and persistent man wanted to make a difference by applying what he knew to the betterment of humanity. Because he took joy in fostering the success of others, we are forever grateful.

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