

# PROMISING PRACTICES

*Its Role in Gifted Education*



San Diego City Schools  
Gifted & Talented Education  
*Distinguished Lecture Series*



SPRING 1985

**Proceedings of the Second Annual**

**Distinguished Lecturer Series**

**on**

**Gifted Education**

**Spring 1985**

**PROMISING PRACTICES**

**Its Role in Gifted Education**

**Edited by**

**Lannie Kanevsky**

**Department of Special Education**

**San Diego State University**

**San Diego Unified School District**

**San Diego**

**1985**

The short story which precedes the professional papers was written by a teacher, Richard Halsey, in fulfillment of the course requirements in order to receive university credit for his attendance at the lectures. He described it as a synthesis of personal experience and reports from his high school students. It reflects many of the needs of highly able minds as described by the papers and presentations in the 1985 series. It also sets the stage for testing the suggestions of the speakers. Here is a child who feels the job and frustration of the ability to learn better than the rest.

# What is the Use of it All?

My father always used to say that I lived my life with the accelerator all the way to the floor. I'd never let up on a project or idea until I had exhausted every possible method I could use to explore it. I remember that for three months, when I was 12 years old, I collected beetles. Not just those black ones that thrust their rear-ends into the air when you touched them but every kind I could get my hands on. I read about beetles, and shared beetles with my sixth grade classmates.

I suppose it sounds weird, but such things were common for me. I became so intent on something that all other matters were eliminated from my life . . . for the moment anyway. For example, I'd be working on an airplane model when my mom would call me for dinner. I'd get so ticked off when she kept demanding that I had to come right away when all I wanted to do was finish the one section of the plane I'd been working on. She lost patience with me very easily.

At school, it was the same way. Teachers lost patience with me all the time. I'd get so bored with the busy work they would make me do. Crossword puzzles, worksheets, questions . . . it was enough to drive me out of my mind. One year I got so fed up that I told the teacher that she was wasting my time. I just blurted it out in the middle of class. She informed me that she was sick and tired of my "high and mighty attitude", to shut up and do the assigned work. Even when I did the assigned work I always had half the period left. That's when I really got into her hair.

Now that I think it through, not all my teachers lost patience with me. I remember Mrs. Johnson, my history teacher in ninth grade. We were talking about the causes of war and she said it would be very difficult for any country to take over ours because we're too independent as individuals. We could never be swayed to believe in some other ideology or form of government. We'd probably fight to the last man. I asked her how Hitler had been able to make millions of people believe in him and she explained that that was different. Then I asked her about the times in America when people acted like mobs and didn't think straight. She didn't answer back right away so I knew I

had her. Then she looked right at me and finally said, "I don't know." Can you believe it! She said she didn't know. I've never heard any teacher say that before. Later Mrs. Johnson encouraged me to read up on the matter which I did . . . and I did nothing else for two months.

I felt pretty good after that experience but when I got a C+ on the final exam in her class, I cried by myself a couple of nights in a row. It's like I failed. I was so stupid I couldn't even be a good student if I tried. I thought, "what's the point in trying?" About that time my dad called me stupid for not being able to remember to do my chores around the house. Thanks dad.

I don't know, I guess I've always been critical of myself. My mom said that I have a lot to live for and that I shouldn't let such little things get me down. I don't consider the things that have gotten me down "little", but then I think about John. John was a friend of mine. He was older than I, as were most of my friends. I seemed to prefer the company of older kids or adults than my own peers when I was younger. At any rate, John was special to me. Everyday he had a smile and always had something nice to say. John also had cancer.

Before I met him, doctors had said that he only had one or two years to live . . . something I never really wanted to accept.

I remember the time we were helping his dad add a room on to their house. John would be pounding away while his dad was teaching him the finer tricks of the construction trade. John would just let every word soak into his mind as if it was the most magnificent thing he had ever heard. After work we would eat dinner his mom had fixed and John and I would spend hours on end reading about and discussing the different types of buildings mankind had created over the years. He loved architecture and couldn't wait to get back outside and finish a wall or nail another piece of trim on.

It was crazy. Here was a guy who was going to die and he's building houses. "I know I'll never be able to build my own place, but at least I can make some contribution to the world before I go," he said once.

About two months before he died, we were talking about school. I was going on and on about how inconsistent the rules were about truancy. You know, if you're truant they suspend you. I mean really,

do they want you in school or not? Then John said, "it really didn't matter where you learned something, just as long as you learned . . . and if I could do one thing in my life, it would be to convince everyone to think and learn and read as much as they can. I would tell them that dumb, misinformed people miss so much out of life. They'll never know why the sky is blue or why the flowers smell so sweet. They'll never understand the secrets of lost civilizations or the joys of discovering a new idea. It's so sad when people don't take advantage of the times they can really learn and end up wasting precious moments thinking about what they did yesterday or what they could be doing tomorrow instead of enjoying the present. I mean they're going to wake up some day with trash cans filled with tomorrows and yesterdays and have nothing to show for it."

Even up to the last day John was drawing pictures of a home he wanted someone to build some day. His dad said he would if John would include a fireplace in every room. John never got to the last fireplace but he did leave me with a message I'll never forget: To learn is a beautiful thing, but it has never been easy to do. You can be ridiculed by others for doing it and you can begin hating yourself for not meeting your own expectations. But if you keep trying and trust your own abilities, the new knowledge will allow you to go places others can only dream of.

I think I'll start reading that book about old English castles John gave me.