
Reviewed by Thelma McIntosh, Associate Professor of Education, University of Hawaii

A recent contribution to the field of special education is Maurice F. Freehill’s Gifted Children. It presents a new and practical synthesis of theories of giftedness and places the responsibility for guidance of the gifted at the door of better informed teachers and counselors.

The book is well organized. The contents are broad in scope, yet historical backgrounds are concisely presented. The writing is free from unnecessary technical language. The book is good reading both for the professional psychologist and the classroom teacher.

The author, originally from Alberta, Canada, completed his doctoral studies at Stanford University, and was, until last year, the Director of Psychological Services and Research and Professor of Psychology at Western Washington State College. He has recently been appointed Chairman of the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Hawaii.

Freehill agrees with Margaret Mead, decrying the democratic demand that the gifted “run on all fours with classmates, neighbors, and business associates.” He emphasizes the value of the educated intellect and seems to give support to the idea that genius is not purely genetically determined but a product of strong intellectual endowment plus important sociological determinants.

Freehill, moreover, refutes the idea that genius and good adjustment are incompatible. Nowhere in the current literature on gifted children is there a better presentation of the distinctions between genius and talented or gifted children than in the chapter on “Genius, Talented or Gifted?”

Freehill deals with the stereotypes of giftedness bluntly, destroying the negative images of gifted children so often found in popular writing in this field. “Gifted learning is characterized by increasing adequacy of perception and organization more than by simple accumulation. It is less additive (quantitative) than usually supposed and is more organizational (qualitative) as finer discriminations and simpler order or arrangements increase the validity of perception and behaviors.” The very nature of the quality of creativeness is diametrically opposed to its classification or standardization.

In the chapters dealing with identification, Freehill examines the behavior of the gifted child in his total social milieu; he notes that the more gifted a child, the more complex is his external and observable behavior.

This reader was delighted with Freehill’s explanation of the mystical “leap and test” characteristic of many gifted children. His analysis gives evidence that gifted children do not leave out the step-by-step approaches to problem solving but are able to generalize and to apply these generalizations more quickly, seeming to telescope many higher level thinking processes.

He throws new light on the resistance of the gifted child to giving the expected or stereotyped responses to problems; he indicates that the higher the level of intellectual activity the more the tendency to “guess” or present alternative or variable responses. Although the superior child may make errors in his attempts to arrive at higher level solutions, he does not repeat his mistakes. He learns which errors in judgment to avoid; he is able to apply this so-called “knowledge by error” to the solving of problems in new areas. Thus he becomes analytical of situations, applying his learning through a complex set of associational patterns.

The author’s positive approach to the theories of leadership and social acceptance should prove of value to counselors who are concerned with guiding the gifted in their vocational choices. It should also be of help to those who are charged with motivating the gifted in spite of what may be an unchallenging high school curriculum. Secondary teachers will re-evaluate their own high school programs for the gifted after reading the descriptions of special workshop experiences which help to bring about more self-direction on the part of gifted children.