



Advocacy for Gifted and Talented in New York

The Palcuzzi Ploy

By: Dr. James J. Gallagher

Mr. Palcuzzi, principal of the Jefferson Elementary School, once got tired of hearing objections to special provisions for gifted children, so he decided to spice up an otherwise mild PTA meeting with his proposal for gifted children. The elements of the Palcuzzi program were as follows:

1. Children should be grouped by ability.
2. Part of the school day should be given over to special instruction.
3. Talented students should be allowed time to share their talents with children of other schools in the area or even of other schools throughout the state. (We will pay the transportation costs.)
4. A child should be advanced according to his talents, rather than according to his age.
5. These children should have special teachers, specially trained and highly salaried.

As might be expected, the "Palcuzzi program" was subjected to a barrage of criticism. "What about the youngster who isn't able to fit into the special group; won't his ego be damaged?" "How about the special cost; how could you justify transportation costs that would have to be paid by moving a special group of students from one school to another?" "Mightn't we be endangering the child by having him interact with children who are much more mature than he is?" "Wouldn't the other teachers complain if we gave more money to the instructors of this group?"

After listening for ten or fifteen minutes, Mr. Palcuzzi dropped his bomb! He said that he wasn't describing a new program for the intellectually gifted, but a program the school system had been enthusiastically supporting for a number of years-the program for gifted basketball players! Palcuzzi took advantage of the silence that followed to review his program again. Do we have ability grouping on our basketball team? Yes, we do. No doubt, the player who does not make the first team or the second team feels very bad about it and may even have some inferiority feelings. However, this will not likely cause the program to be changed.

Do we allow part of the school day to be given over to special work? Generally speaking, the last hour of the day can be used, by tradition, for practice of basketball talents. [Or students leave early to be transported to games at other schools.]

Do we allow these children to share their talents with other students from other schools and other cities? Yes, we do, and, what is more, we pay the transportation costs involved without very many complaints being heard.

Do we allow gifted basketball players to advance by their talents rather than by their age? Indeed, we do. Any sophomore who can make the team on the basis of his talents gets the privilege of playing with seniors, and no one worries very much about it.

Finally, do we have special teachers who are specially trained and more highly salaried than the ordinary teacher? Yes, we do, and although there is some grumbling about it from the regular teachers, this does not materially affect the program.

What does this tell us? The culture and the community will support the kinds of activities that they find necessary, valuable and/or enjoyable. If they feel that a program is sufficiently necessary or sufficiently enjoyable, all sorts of objections are put aside as being relatively inconsequential. If, on the other hand, the community is not fully interested or involved in supporting such a program, all kinds of objections can be raised as to why these things should not be done, or cannot be done.

Teaching the Gifted Child, Second Edition, Dr. James J. Gallagher, 1975, p. 83-84.