

## **Educational Therapy for the Gifted: The Chicago Approach**

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While all mental health professionals who work for schools would like to provide unconditional assistance in meeting their client's needs, the job description for such individuals in public schools often interferes with a strict adherence to this practice. Case loads are heavy, and the roles to be performed many. What kind of counseling, then, can be delivered in a public school context?

It would seem that the essence of what schools are about, educational therapy, should be the focus of the service. Emphasis on placement, support, encouragement, and development of the breadth and depth of the child's potential is that which the school can best deliver while using the counselor as advocate and confidante for the child. Knowing how and when to refer the child's problems to outside resources and finding the right educational milieu in which the child's potential will flourish are no small accomplishments in that setting. The gifted child, in particular, by virtue of high educational potential, is best suited to this type of educational therapy and perhaps best able to develop cognitive strategies for making informed choices that will result in better adjustment.

### **The Chicago Model of Educational Therapy**

The Chicago Public Schools have developed and expanded a multi-dimensional approach for meeting the needs of its gifted population. Central to its operation is a strong counseling component, carried out by full-time trained personnel in the areas of school psychology and social work who provide one-to-one services to gifted students and their families upon request.

In addition to the central counseling thrust, over 400 programs ranging from kindergarten to college are offered to those children identified as gifted from the 429,000 students in the system. Four full-time coordinators, along with eight pupil personnel staff members, assist local schools in developing such gifted programs through inservice training and information sharing relative to identification, administrative arrangements, curriculum, and evaluation. The gifted staff is clustered by specialty in four regional offices throughout the city so that a full range of services can be provided in a given geographical area, from program development to individual testing to family counseling.

Social workers and psychologists in these regional offices receive and follow up on referrals from other social workers and psychologists in the system as well as parents, administrators, and teachers in local schools. Types of service provided by this team include:

1. Individual and group testing with follow-up assessment of appropriate program placement.

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2. Consultation on, and monitoring of, identification procedures for all gifted programs in the system.
3. Development of Individual Educational Programs (IEP's) for selected students.
4. Provision for educational program intervention.
5. Individual or group counseling for gifted children whose emotional problems are interfering with their social or academic adjustment.
6. Consultation with parents of gifted children.
7. Consultation with school administrators and teachers on affective development issues as they may relate to the education of gifted students.
8. Provision of liaison services to community agencies.

### **Chicago Gifted Program Prototypes**

The educational options provided by the Chicago gifted program include many prototypes in respect to grouping and program focus. Full-day gifted magnet schools in which children are selected from several districts for homogenous grouping are one such prototype. The focus of these programs is breadth and depth in core content areas while offering special language, science, art, and logic courses for further enrichment. Admission is based on achievement scores at the 90th percentile and intelligence test data either from individual or group testing.

All-city programs in local museums constitute a learning laboratory of unlimited resources for high school students with access to libraries, collections, documents, workshops, and the expertise of the professional staff. These also include the study of the museum itself as an institution and its goals as a community facility. Students meet one afternoon a week and receive academic credit for their participation. Selection is made on the basis of principal and teacher recommendations, application essay, and standardized test data. Museology programs are conducted at such Chicago landmarks as the Art Institute, Field Museum, Museum of Science and Industry, and the Chicago Historical Society.

Other all-city programs include band and orchestra, an all-city chorus, and a radio broadcasting program, "Spotlight on the Gifted," which features selected programs and topics about the Chicago Gifted Program.

Local elementary school programs offer a number of program options in which inservice, curriculum, and materials are closely defined for the subject. These include: Junior Great Books; Unified Mathematics; Man: A Course of Study; Introductory Physical Science; Philosophy for Children; and the Story Workshop. By combining grades 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, and 7-8, comprehensive gifted centers have been created in some of the larger schools that allow for all-day

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homogeneous grouping of gifted students within a school. Advanced placement courses and several humanities programs are included as part of the high school curriculum, and recently Chicago has added the International Baccalaureate program to its offerings at selected sites.

Most individual local school programs grew out of local school needs and interests, with a teacher willing to develop a proposal and an administrator who would help implement a gifted program. Writing, art, and various other topics are included among these.

A counseling component is included as a standard part of each school's program for implementation by the teacher. Thus, summer inservice programs for teachers include considerable discussion of general characteristics of gifted students and case examples of counseling strategies that have proven successful. Social workers and psychologists also serve children in these programs as well as others who are referred. The development of counseling models that can be implemented by teachers has been effective in bringing service to more students.

University based programs are offered to junior-high-age students who have met a minimum score criterion on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), given in the spring to all students in the system who are at the 95th percentile or higher on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), mathematics or verbal sections. These programs are offered on school time once a week at three universities in the city: Chicago State University, Loyola University, and the University of Illinois, Circle Campus. The content offered includes Latin, creative writing, and algebra.

From *A Practical Guide To Counseling the Gifted in a School Setting*, Joyce Van Tassel-Baska, Ed., The Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, VA, 1983.