

MULTINATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON GIFTEDNESS AND THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED CHILDREN: A SPANISH TRILOGY

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Yolanda Benito Mate, a clinical psychologist who directs the Psychological and Educational Center Huerta del Rey in Valladolid, Spain, has edited three related books on gifted children and their education in the space of four years. These books have all been published by Amarú Ediciones in Salamanca, Spain. Their titles are as follows:

1. Problemática del Niño Superdotado (1990) (Problems of Gifted Children) ;
2. Desarrollo y Educación de Los Niños Superdotados (1992) (The Development and Education of Gifted Children) ; and
3. Intervención e Investigación Psicoeducativas en Alumnos Superdotados (1994) (Psychoeducational Interventions and Research on Gifted Students).

The expressed purpose of these volumes is to examine the diverse characteristics and needs of gifted and talented children from different theoretical and educational points of view. Many authors, such as the ones who attend the International Congress on giftedness, have contributed to these volumes, and these include authors from the United States, France, Portugal, and Bulgaria, but the majority of the authors are from Spain. True to the Hispanic intellectual tradition, however, their readings are catholic, and they quote relevant sources from throughout the world, from South America to Russia, from Taiwan to eastern Europe.

Several themes dominate these books. The first one is straightforward : gifted and talented children have to face all of the developmental tasks that all normal children must master. The second is that gifted and talented children are very diverse. Theme three is that gifted and talented children need special attention to avert "bad habits" of work, and theme four is that early intellectual maturity requires early identification and developmentally appropriate intervention. In short, the three volumes summarize past and current research on giftedness per se and deduce the educational practices that stem from these research-based understandings of giftedness.

Benito Mate clearly intends these three books to familiarize Spanish-speaking psychologists and educational practitioners with both the theory and methods that surround the process of selecting and educating gifted children. Except for issues of gender, prejudice or bigotry are not discussed, so one may conclude that these books are not written for a Spanish-speaking country such as the United States, where significant numbers of Hispanic children who are very bright languish in regular and even in remedial or compensatory education classes, because they

have simply never been referred for possible selection or, worse yet, because they attend schools where there is no one to select them until they have mastered enough of the dominant language to let their gifts be known.

Poignant case histories and long personal accounts illustrate the trials of growing up, especially the lack of synchrony of better yet the dissynchrony between gifted children's intellectual development and their social and psychomotor development, for example, between their ability to read and their inability to write at an early age, and between growth in intelligence and a lag in affect. These are precisely the kinds of concerns I would expect intellectuals from the Hispanic tradition to bring up. Hence, the psychological traps for a gifted and talented child are discussed at some length: rationalization, the lack of effort to integrate knowledge when something is merely understood, and conformity to the "norm". Similarly, the different authors stress the need for gifted and talented children to have both age peers and mental age peers.

One point of emphasis throughout, one that is raised by many different authors, is the need to prevent academic frustration and failure, hence the need to teach psychomotor skills, study skills, social/interpersonal skills, such as leadership, and to provide opportunities for creativity—all in developmentally appropriate ways. Interesting, no?

So all three books devote considerable attention to the development of creativity, not just academic achievement. Numerous authors evince a concern for well rounded, well adjusted children so that they can be creative. Several accounts of children who have "special ways of focusing social intercourse, including the ability to capture the attention of adults in a variety of socially acceptable ways" alert the reader to the importance that these authors place on social development and the interpersonal skills that can indicate giftedness. These interpersonal dimensions are reminiscent of Bernal's early study (1974) of gifted Mexican-American children, who are often identified by their parents and other adults by their exceptional social intelligence.

For those readers who, as Hispanophiles, would expand their vocabulary in Spanish to speak technically of gifted and talented children, these books present excellent opportunities to master the terms in Castellano. Consider the following:

- 1-Gifted Children: Niños muy capacitados; niños superdotados.
- 2-I.Q.: Cociente intelectual.
- 3-Precocity: Precocidad;

- 4-Extracurricular: Extraescolar;
- 5- Enrichment: Enriquecimiento;
- 6- Acceleration: Aceleración;
- 7- Homogeneous grouping: Agrupamiento homogéneo;
- 8- Revolving Door: puerta giratoria;
- 9- G: inteligencia monolítica.

Again, true to the general Hispanic culture's run of attention, these books emphasize the development of leadership traits, especially through group processes, and explore the application of sociometric techniques as well as group problem-solving methods—all well known to gifted educators, but targeted in this case to the cultivation of interpersonal skills. In my opinion, leadership is not nearly stressed so much in U.S. GT education, but is left to grow spontaneously in GT settings or more as a byproduct of good teaching and classroom management.

The second book edited by Benito Mate (1992), *The Development and Education of Gifted Children*, is definitely a sigma higher in content than both the first and the third volumes, which appear as primers by comparison. *Development and Education* focuses on more advanced models of intelligence in giftedness and explains various approaches to curricular frameworks for the schooling of gifted children. No less than 17 contributors from throughout the western world are included in this tome, and sensitive matters, particularly in the Spanish speaking world, such as gender issues (the "invisibility" of GT women; difficulty of identifying gifted females) are taken up by Benito Mate herself as author and co-author. Works such as Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration are taken up to explain the supportive personality traits associated with creativity.

Benito Mate's third volume (*Psychoeducational Interventions and Research on Gifted Students*) is based on the Second International Congress on giftedness held in 1993 in Valladolid, Spain. The book's chapters are organized into three parts: (1) Models of Giftedness and Identification, (2) Creativity development of gifted and talented children, and (3) Educational programs. The models of mind/intelligence include a review of Sternberg's triarchic theory of intelligence. The highly gifted and the relationship between creativity and intelligence are discussed in chapters by Benito Mate in ways to enlighten the general reader. Much of the work is a recapitulation of the first two books, including extensive discussions in working with parents, the influence of planned creativity, and the developmental challenges to GT girls. Renzulli's enrichment models figure prominently under educational programs, and Reis argues persuasively to teach study skills, critical thinking, and discipline-based inquiry to gifted and talented children. Other ways to deliver GT instruction are also discussed, at some length, as is the unusual option of home schooling.

The books have chapters that are fairly well translated into Spanish, and the technical quality of editing is fair. The quality of the covers and binding materials are definitely superior in the last two paperbacks but very poor in the first.

But the real strength of these books is not in their spines but in what I believe will be their great appeal to educators and intellectuals throughout much of North and South America. The books present diversity in content and point of view, address a wide range of psychological, social, and pedagogical issues, and make a direct appeal through theory and interesting case histories to Hispanic professionals and intellectuals, especially those who share European educational values and fully appreciate the importance of educating the best and the brightest in special ways. Indeed, the rationale for the education of gifted children in these books is the "right to diversity". Readers in the United States who have a good command of Spanish (or who are only fairly good but have a great deal of skill in using the Larousse) will also enjoy reading many of the chapters in these books or even browsing and reading only certain parts. Benito Mate has done an excellent job of sectioning the articles, so finding the parts of great interest is not difficult task. I strongly recommend their purchase from Amarú Ediciones or from the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, Incorporated.

References

- Bernal, E.M. (1974), Gifted Mexican American children: An ethnoscientific perspective. *California Journal of Educational Research*, 25, 261-273.