

Bright children deserve better

Bright and gifted children should be permitted to begin school earlier, skip grades and enter college at the age of 16 if they are qualified, a University of Michigan educator maintains.

ren A. Ketcham, "that groups youngsters according to age instead of learning ability."

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Early enrollment, accelerated courses and the multi-age open classroom were among the topics being discussed in the U-M's summer workshop on the education of gifted children. "We have basically the finest educational system ever created," Ketcham said. "But for the gifted, it is in danger of becoming too rigid and bureaucratic. The schools must incorporate more flexibility, diversity and choice."

"THE CHALLENGE, however, begins at home. Even as an infant, the gifted child will be larger and stronger than others in his age group. He will walk and talk earlier, ask and

notice more about his surroundings, act more independent and need less rest."

Parents can provide a stimulating home environment at little or no cost, Ketcham says.

"Many things a family discards can be tools in the hands of a gifted child: old clocks and radios, wood scraps, 'dress-up' clothing, and picture magazines such as National Geographic and Look."

The U-M professor favors the simplest toys: paper, scissors, crayons and paste.

"In general, the more expensive and elaborate a toy is, the less educational it is," he said. "The creativity and challenge is taken out of it."

"GIFTED CHILDREN are probably the most appropriate candidates for pre-school education. We have tended toward the opposite view, creating programs for slow learners and youngsters from deprived environments."

"But at an early age, the gifted have the need and capacity to expand their world beyond the home and family."

Ketcham believes bright children should be allowed to skip a grade or two in order to associate with students who are their intellectual equals.

"Among all the programs that have been proposed for the gifted, acceleration requires no changes in curriculum or teaching methods, no extra cost, and the effects are immediate."

He urges, however, that secondary school curriculums be made more flexible.

"For example, one Michigan high school has split the traditional sophomore-junior-senior English classes into 23 electives — literary criticism, speech, mass media, reading skills, theater arts. All youngsters need choice and diversity, but especially the gifted."

"MOST EXPERTS agree that the gifted child is capable of self-determination at 13 or 14 — six to 10 years earlier than the average person. All too many youngsters become frustrated with 'the system' by this point, and hit the open road. The basis of a sound home and school environment must be laid during the first 10 years; after that point, it may be too late."

Bright and gifted children represent two to five per cent of the population, Ketcham said. Why should such a tiny minority rate special attention?

"Because these are the people who are going to contribute a very important category of ideas — not just technological inventions, but social and scientific philosophy that will give our culture a sense of purpose. They are the Einsteins, the Edisons, the Emersons."

"Through their own intellectual strength, they will follow their own destinies. But in a world as large and complex as this one, we cannot leave this to chance."

"When you are talking about only two to five per cent of the population," Ketcham said, "think what it means to lose just one?"

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In March 1971, a public service commemorative was issued bearing the words "Giving Blood Saves Lives." According to the American Association of Blood Banks, this stamp produced enough blood donors to replenish blood bank shortages for six months.

In the past years, the Postal Service has used the heavy exposure of stamps to get messages across on various public service projects.

Stamps have urged Americans to register and vote (1968), to preserve the environment (1974) and to help retarded children (1974). In 1965, a commemorative brought attention to traffic safety and another to the cancer crusade with its reminder that early diagnosis saves lives. In 1968 a law-and-order stamp was issued.

A COMMEMORATIVE issue of 1974 stressed energy conservation. A stamp in 1972 brought attention to family planning and wildlife conservation. Drug abuse prevention was the theme of a 1971 stamp. Water conservation was stressed in 1960 and was again highlighted in 1970 when a block of four stamps carried the expanded message: "Save our water, save our soil, save our air and save our cities."

"Food for Peace-Freedom from Hunger" in 1963, "Employ the Handicapped" in 1960 and "Forest Conservation" in 1959 are but a few of the messages carried by public service commemoratives.

Even stamps like the recently issued "Skylab" mission can be categorized in this manner when you consider that the basic space mission was to study earth and its sun and, due to this study, patterns of air and water pollutants were identified.

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