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Jennifer L. Jolly, Ph.D.

Leta S. Hollingworth: P. S. 165 & 500: Lessons Learned

In the early 1920s, as the field of gifted education was establishing itself as a legitimate field of study and practice, Leta Hollingworth sought to understand what best classroom practices would best suit gifted students. Hollingworth built upon the work of Lulu Stedman and other pioneers in the field of gifted education, in combination with her own research, to create a curriculum and qualitatively different schooling experience for gifted students. Her groundbreaking work at P. S. 165 and 500 was chronicled in her numerous published works and provides the initial research base for practices in gifted education.

Before the establishment of special classes for gifted students at P. S. 165 and 500 in New York City, other such classes had been introduced at P. S. 15 and 64. However, these classes were on a much smaller scale, and little had been done to document their progress or gather information on the gifted students' academic, social, or emotional needs (Klein, 2002). P. S. 64's Opportunity Class offered gifted students "an enriched curriculum . . . with privileges to meet the needs of children whose capabilities extended to the highest possible degree of attainment" (Specht, 1919, p. 393).

Classes at P. S. 15 and 64 were the exception rather than the accepted practice for educating gifted children. Hollingworth noted either the simple lack of regard for the education of the gifted or the outright resentment voiced by others who viewed giftedness as something to be repelled as undemocratic rather than embraced as a form of democracy. Hollingworth, citing Professor Walter Pitkin of Columbia University, observed,

After all, the average tax-payer and voter has enough animal egotism in him to resent the suggestion that he spend his own good money to train children brighter than his own, so

that, in the next generation they may hold high positions—while his own children earn a simple living as chauffeurs, bricklayers, motormen and janitors . . . in our country at least we cannot hope to combine, under our public school system, mass education and the selective training of leaders. (as cited in Hollingworth, 1930, pp. 196–197)

Hollingworth (1924a) defined *democracy* as follows: "every human being has an opportunity to live and work in accordance with their inborn capacity for achievement" (p. 298). Hollingworth (1926) also believed, "The child should have brought to his attention whatever will most help him to adjust successfully to a civilized world, and at the same time to render maximum service to others, of which he may be capable" (p. 313).

In 1922, 5 years after her initial meeting with Child E, an extremely gifted youngster, Hollingworth gained an opportunity to serve the academic needs of gifted children and study these children in an authentic environment. She was eager to offer educational opportunities for the most able, just as special classes had been established for the "feebleminded."

It has been urged that there need be no special provisions for the able, as they can take care of themselves under any circumstances and may be trusted to find their own way through the world. We do not know the truth of this assumption and cannot know it until at least one generation of tested children has passed through adulthood. . . . It has already been shown that they find their way forward in school, but not to a level commensurate with their capacity for functioning. (Hollingworth, 1926, pp. 296–297)

Hollingworth's work with the Special Opportunity Class at P. S. 165 eventually would yield nearly 40 research articles, a textbook, and the blueprints for Hollingworth's work at P. S. 500 approximately 15 years later (Hollingworth, 1990). In the early 1920s, P. S. 165 struggled with several "misfits" who were too academically advanced to be with their chronological age peers but unable to socially adapt when advanced three grade levels.

The Special Opportunity Class was organized with the idea that within the district might be found enough such children of approximately the same chronological age to form a class which would be relatively homogeneous, both socially and educationally; that their needs might then be studied and provided for. (Cobb, Hollingworth, Monahan, Taylor, & Theobald, 1923, p. 121).

A scarce knowledge base existed as to how to provide a differentiated curriculum for gifted students. P. S. 165 provided such opportunities not only for gifted children but also for those interested practitioners and researchers (Cobb et al.).

The committee responsible for organizing the opportunity class at P. S. 165 consisted of Jacob S. Theobald, principal of the school; Jane E. Monahan, assistant principal; and Margaret V. Cobb, Grace A. Taylor, and Leta S. Hollingworth, all of Teachers College of Columbia University. Although all members of the committee participated in some fashion in the running of the classes, Hollingworth's body of work chronicles the day-to-day academic work and research conducted (Hollingworth, 1990). Through Hollingworth's numerous published

works, one can gain an idea of the activities and research that transpired at P. S. 165. The intense interest and passion Hollingworth possessed for these children served to mold the curricular choices and agenda that guided students and staff (Hollingworth, 1990).

Before classes could begin, several significant practical problems presented themselves when the committee members considered the various aims of the Special Opportunity Class:

1. Decide the limits of the group. Those recognized were:
 - a. Chronological age, a range of two years, seven to nine approximately, the exact range to be so adjusted as to include the largest number of the children found.
 - b. Intelligence Quotient. Over 160 by the Stanford Binet Test.
 - c. Scholastic attainment, . . . practically unlimited.
 - d. Geographical range, with the reach of Public School 165.
 - e. Parents appreciative of the opportunity.
2. Find the children. The members of the Committee knew half a dozen eligible children. The requirement for opening the class was a group of 25.
3. Find the teacher (in New York schools, preferably in Public School 165) of adequate training and experience, unusual intelligence, initiative, personality and breadth of interest. She should especially be capable of undertaking modifications of curriculum and method, and of estimating results of such modification.
4. Secure financial backing to cover the expenses of the undertaking for three years. The main items of expense foreseen were: assistant to the teacher, scientific curriculum study and supervi-

sion of the class, clerical service, transportation for children who lived beyond walking distance, unusual equipment and books for the classroom, and excursions and visits.

5. Study the children genetically, physically, psychologically, and educationally; keep records of their development and progress, physically, socially and educationally.
6. Plan and get into operation, group and if necessary individual, curricula to keep all the children suitably occupied, working to capacity and progressing each in the directions most profitable to him. (Cobb et al., 1923, p. 123)

The Special Opportunity Class ultimately became two classes. One class constituted children whose intelligent quotients were above 155 and another whose intelligent quotients were between 134 and 154. This distinction also presented an additional research element investigated by Hollingworth (Hollingworth, 1990). Questions raised by Hollingworth included: What should be taught? By whom? and To what end? Within the circles of gifted education, the merits of rapid advancement versus enrichment presented an ongoing debate. Hollingworth's initial reaction was that "educational speculation favors enrichment" (Hollingworth, 1924a, p. 278).

Therefore, enrichment became the guiding principle of Hollingworth's curriculum at P. S. 165. One of the first articles published from a curricular standpoint involved the study of biography as a form of enrichment. Hollingworth (1924b) explained her choice of biography as follows:

. . . [W]e chose biography because we believed it would tend to prepare young, very

gifted children for the life of which they are capable, because at the age of 8 to 10 years they are intellectually ready to profit by it, because attitudes and ideals formed in childhood have great influence, and because biography is not offered elsewhere in the usual, established curriculum. (p. 281).

Hollingworth herself conducted the initial lessons on biography. Forty minutes each Tuesday morning were allocated to the study. Reports were presented in seminar style, and each child read his or her report to the class followed by a discussion session. Their reports focused on such eminent persons as Julius Caesar, George Washington, Queen Victoria, George Eliot, and Louis Agassiz. An effort was consistently made to tie the eminent person's field to the regular curriculum (Hollingworth, 1924b). The students described this area of study as "interesting and enjoyable, gives us useful knowledge, helps in other studies, gives inspiration to accomplish things, gives the pleasure of searching through many books, and teaches how people achieve great things" (Hollingworth, 1924b, p. 285).

Many of Hollingworth's thoughts on schooling and organization of the curriculum are found in *Gifted Children: Their Nature and Nurture*. Published in 1926, this work documented much of what she had learned about gifted children through her work at P. S. 165. This included the identification of a new set of challenges for the public school regarding curriculum, system changes, selection of teachers, pedagogical concerns, and differing rates of progress.

Hollingworth, too, recognized the double-edged sword rapid advancement presented for the gifted child. Asynchronous development between

intellect and physical and emotional maturity made rapid advancement difficult for many children. Hollingworth believed this problem to be most prominent during the first few years of elementary school when age discrepancies between a 5- and 8-year-old were significant. "Three years of difference at an early period in development is much greater than three years of difference later" (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 298).

Nevertheless, rapid progress did possess some advantages. Gifted students could essentially shave 3 or more years off their formal schooling and training in order to enter a profession and become self-sustaining at a much earlier age.

Time saving in the years preceding the professional school itself is suggested, because it would probably be much more difficult to arrange modification of organization there than in non-professional schools. . . . a gifted mind will want to spend unlimited time in the mastery of the special branch of knowledge chosen as a life work. (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 300)

By combining rapid advancement with segregated classes, Hollingworth offered a reasonable solution for addressing the needs of gifted children. "Special opportunity classes for gifted children certainly make it possible for such children to accomplish as much as they normally can, while in company of others of their own age" (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 300). Hollingworth noted the standard concerns voiced about segregated classes. Segregated classes were thought to encourage conceit in gifted students, stimulate jealousy in those not chosen, promote undemocratic ideals, and remove mental stimuli for

students of average intelligence. She presented arguments and evidence to contradict these points. "The objection that special opportunity classes for the able . . . make the members conceited is probably groundless. . . . A pupil coming into special classes often meets his rival for the first time" (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 301). Hollingworth proposed that with the removal of the gifted students, the class would naturally seek out others to take positions of academic leadership. She also attributed the feelings of jealousy not so much to children not chosen but to their parents. The so-called "undemocratic" nature of segregated classes mirrored that of the groups formed in society of like-minded people whether based on neighborhoods, clubs, or professional associations (Hollingworth, 1926).

Hollingworth was most concerned that teachers of gifted children possess the right attitudes toward this special population of students. "The teacher must be free from unconscious jealousy and from unconfessed bias against gifted children" (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 306). Other essential traits teachers must possess included a sense of humor, patience, and "love of truth for its own sake" (p. 308). The teacher also should be of equally high intelligence, in order to keep up with the students and not be unduly intellectually strained (Hollingworth, 1926).

Pedagogical methods also required modification. Such modifications "can be derived by corollary from study of the psychology of these children as well as from the actual experience of the classroom" (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 308). Practice of repetitious drills in reading, arithmetic, and spelling was greatly diminished, although not abandoned altogether. Instead, Hollingworth encouraged the project method to enable students to

draw conclusions, find patterns, and discuss themes on whatever topic of interest was under consideration. Students presented their findings or products in seminar style in order for other students in the class to have the opportunity to comment or question. This was a dramatic departure from the commonly practiced recitation method, which required all students to study the same assignment, and then the teacher would pose questions to the class as a whole (Hollingworth, 1926). Hollingworth noted that many gifted students at the elementary level preferred oral presentations to written reports because their motor skills had not yet caught up with their thought processes and writing was very laborious for many of them. As a result, large numbers of P. S. 165 students learned to use a typewriter (Hollingworth, 1926).

Hollingworth advocated that all classrooms should be properly outfitted; however, gifted children required several adjustments to their environment. A library included a great number of reference books, including encyclopedias, atlases, maps, dictionaries (in both English and foreign languages), and volumes of poetry. She also suggested the addition of tables or shelves to display the numerous collections gathered by the students, ranging from stamps to various alphabets. Another break from the traditional classroom involved basic furniture. "Moveable seats and desks . . . facilitate the formation of small groups for special study hours and permit space to be cleared on occasion" (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 311). The type of classroom Hollingworth envisioned did not mesh well with desks and seats bolted to the floor, a commonplace in many American schools.

The difference between a regular classroom and that of the opportunity

room was the enrichment available to students. Hollingworth thought this was the lynchpin that made the curriculum qualitatively different from the fare offered in the regular classroom. Enrichment also helped to stem the social problems that students encountered due to rapid acceleration, thus allowing them to stay with their chronological-aged peers but still proving intellectually challenging. Hollingworth considered gifted and talented students the future originators and innovators of ideas. The curriculum Hollingworth perceived was designated to cultivate such "originality" (Hollingworth, 1926).

"To take their places in civilization, therefore, it would seem that the intellectually gifted need especially to know *the history and evolution of the life of civilized man*" (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 313). The representative curriculum of the 1920s did not present this as a "systematic body of knowledge," if at all (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 25). Hollingworth cited the favorable success of this enrichment curriculum at P. S. 165. The following comprise a list of topics offered to students under the "history of civilization": food, shelter, and clothing; health and sanitation; communication; transportation; trade; law; government; education; science; art; philosophy (history of human thought); institutions; warfare; labor; and recreations. In accordance with the project method, each student chose a topic he or she was most interested in and then developed a project focusing on the topic (Hollingworth, 1926).

Hollingworth also included a course of study entitled "Practical Banking," comparable to Lulu Stedman's study of banking in the opportunity room at the Southern Branch of the University of California. This 3-week course of study entailed four main goals:

1. To give information as to why banks exist; of the nature and scope of their business; of their methods of transacting business; of the services which they render to the community; as to how banks make money; as to how banks assist their customers; and of the relation between the interests of the bank and its community.
2. To dispel the mystery surrounding banks and bankers.
3. To encourage early connection and cooperation with local banks.
4. To instill a spirit of thrift and conservation. (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 318)

In 1926, Hollingworth urged further experimentation with curriculum for the gifted in order to determine exactly what appropriate curricular offerings most benefited gifted students. Other experimental units conducted across the country included Greek architecture, modern foreign language, appreciation of music, graphic and dramatic arts, and mythology. "A suitable literature and a feasible plan of procedure will be formulated gradually from daily life in the experimental classroom" (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 333).

In 1925, with the end of opportunity classes at P. S. 165, and in 1936, with the establishment of P. S. 500, Hollingworth published research articles based on the information garnered from her work at P. S. 165 and further studies of these students.

[W]e wrought with diligence upon the whole child for three brief years; and then we watched them through high school, and then fascinated with what we saw, we watched them through college; . . . these 56 youngsters were out of college, and I was fixing to observe them, and

them only, for the rest of my life. (as cited in Hollingworth, 1990, p. 127)

In fact, she intended for her longitudinal study of P. S. 165 to be her life's work.

However, in 1936, Hollingworth abandoned her longitudinal study of P. S. 165 students and returned to the education of gifted students with the creation of P. S. 500, Speyer School, a laboratory school for the study of exceptional children. "The education of exceptional children is not just another one of "those things." It is an issue solidly based on the verifiable facts of educational psychology" (as cited in Hollingworth, 1990, p. 128). Her work at the Speyer School consumed her and left little time to continue her longitudinal study of P. S. 165 students.

From the lessons learned from her work at P. S. 165, Hollingworth expanded, modified, and molded a curriculum that would best serve the gifted students at Speyer School. Hollingworth also chose to address the issue of emotional education and the unique perspectives gifted students held of the world around them (Hollingworth, 1990). P. S. 500 would be a joint venture between the New York City Public School and Teachers College just as P. S. 165 had been. The Speyer School had been established in 1901 as an "Experimental Station" for Teachers College where doctoral students in both psychology and education conducted studies in conjunction with Teachers College faculty. The school was purposefully located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan to serve students whose fathers were "shop-keepers, teamsters, janitors, policemen, and street-car conductors" (Lagemann, 2000, p. 115).

P. S. 500 housed exceptional children with standard deviations

both above and below the norm (Hollingworth, 1936). "The unique features of Public School 500 are (1) that it is a school for exceptional children who are not mentally deficient; (2) that every pupil in the school was selected solely on the basis of mental tests; and (3) that the same pupils will be kept under experimental instruction for five years" (Hollingworth, 1936, p. 86). In fact, the majority of students at P. S. 500 had an IQ from 75–90. Fifty students tested above 130 and constituted the "Terman classes" (Hollingworth, 1936).

P. S. 500 opened on February 3, 1936. Each of the two Terman classes consisted of 25 students, with an equal number of boys and girls. All students had turned 7 years old and none were older than 9 years 7 months. Most students were between their eighth and ninth birthdays. A concerted effort was made to find children who represented "all ethnic stocks in the city" (p. 88) and who originated from every borough of New York City (Hollingworth, 1936). The majority of students at P. S. 165 had been neighborhood children from predominantly Jewish homes. Hollingworth now determined that the student body at P. S. 500 would be more representative of the greater New York City area (Hollingworth, 1990).

Much scrutiny was given to the selection of teachers for these two classes. Past teaching records and interest in experimental work were of utmost importance (Hollingworth, 1936). Hollingworth also noted "[they] rat[ed] high in all the qualities which win and keep the respect of intelligent children" (Hollingworth, 1936, p. 87). Miss Kathryn Gallagher and Mrs. Myrna Ingram Schuck held elementary teaching certificates and were chosen to teach in the Terman classes. Other instructors were hired to teach special subjects such as French, art, science, and nutrition

(Hollingworth, 1936). The school also relied on the assistance of volunteers who supplied books, furniture, and other basic needs such as plumbing repairs, "although experiments were to be undertaken, no personnel and no resources were provided" (Hollingworth, 1990).

The curricular issues that teachers faced at P. S. 165 also surfaced at P. S. 500. Hollingworth asked pointedly,

How shall we choose the materials for the world's stock of knowledge with which to enrich the intellectual life of these gifted pupils? From what premises shall we reason, in selecting materials, which they will not otherwise find the course of formal instruction? (Hollingworth, 1936, p. 87)

Revisiting the argument proposed in *Gifted Children: Their Nature and Nurture*, Hollingworth asserted that gifted students were the future authors of important ideas.

We are guided primarily by one important fact of psychology, newly learned; i.e., the fact of the restrictive nature of the world's work as regards degrees of intellect. It has been discovered that there are some kinds of work which can be done by only the highly intelligent, and by them only. (Hollingworth, 1936, p. 88)

An enriched curriculum was again Hollingworth's main approach to serving the academic needs of the P. S. 500 Terman class students. "It should afford them a rich background of ideas, in terms of which they may perceive the significant features of their own times" (Hollingworth, 1938, p. 297). To acquire this body of

knowledge, the study of “The History and Evolution of the Life of Civilized Man” introduced in *Gifted Children* was developed into the “Evolution of Common Things” by 1936. These units were the main enrichment projects undertaken by the Terman classes. The 15 topics introduced in *Gifted Children* resumed their role in the curriculum at P. S. 500. Students undertook the research and work connected with the study of common things from one of the 15 topics suggested (Hollingworth, 1938).

Fifteen years prior at P. S. 165, biography was an important component. It was still valued by Hollingworth at P. S. 500. Not only did students study the importance of things, but they also studied the minds, which brought such things to importance. “During the year 1936–1937, about one hundred persons were ‘biografied’ by our pupils, most of them persons who have given us important ‘common things’” (Hollingworth, 1938, p. 302).

Terman class students undertook the study of French language and literature. This language was favored over others for the simple fact that a French instructor was available to the school. Hollingworth outlined three main reasons students needed to undertake the study of a foreign language, including the opportunity to meet foreign persons with whom they would exchange ideas, the early introduction of language to facilitate the mastery of such a language, and the expansion of the number of languages a student mastered from possibly two to three or more by the time they finished high school (Hollingworth, 1938).

The lion’s share of Hollingworth’s work in the schools focused on the early grades because, she believed, “. . . it is in the primary and elementary school that the very intelligent child most especially needs a supplement to the

standard curriculum” (Hollingworth, 1939a, p. 90). Still, Hollingworth did exert enough forethought to address the quandary that students would face as they transitioned to high school. In 1939, the first group of students who enrolled at P. S. 500 three years earlier was being promoted to high school at the age of 13. A dialogue ensued between the elementary and high school educators as to the chief issues at hand. The following nine questions emerged:

1. Why is 13 years to be chosen as the optimum age for the transition?
2. Why is junior high school omitted from the picture?
3. What ceremony, if any, should mark the transition to senior high school?
4. What items of cumulative record should accompany the pupil as he or she enters high school?
5. What differences are there in the demands of high school, as compared with the elementary school, which would affect the minimum I. Q. at which enrichment is needed in the high school? Is enrichment needed in the high school at 130 I. Q. (S-B)?
6. The point at which enrichment begins to be needed having been determined experimentally, how should the secondary school organize to provide a genuine education for pupils at and above that level?
7. Assuming an enrichment program for pupils above 150 I. Q. (S-B) desirable or imperatively necessary in high schools, what matters shall be agreed upon to enter into the curriculum?
8. Shall we guide all of our highly intelligent elementary-school pupils into the college preparatory courses? Or shall some of

them be so guided that they will end high school without the ‘credits’ for college?

9. What can and should public schools do for those few pupils who test at or above 170 I. Q. (S-B), for whom no experimental work so far done is of much real effect, either in elementary or secondary school? (Hollingworth, 1939a, pp. 93–94)

After surveying other teachers and students from P. S. 165, educators agreed that age 13 was the best age to transition to high school. At this age, conservation of time in school was achieved without the social issues that immaturity (both physically and emotionally) had presented former students of P. S. 165. The boys especially voiced concerns over their entering college at 15 and the social tensions that would arise. P. S. 500 originated with a 5-year plan making junior high obsolete, entering at age 8, exiting at age 13, with direct admission to high school. Because the student body as a whole would not be graduating together, several students would graduate at the end of each term, and no formal ceremony was deemed necessary. A cumulative record including aptitude and achievement test scores, teacher ratings of various character traits, and health and attendance records were transferred along with the student when he or she would transition to high school (Hollingworth, 1939a).

Hollingworth noted that students who scored 130 to 150 IQ would be sufficiently challenged by college preparatory courses at the high school level. However,

What these pupils need is merely freedom from the presence of great masses of classmates who are mentally unadapted to the college preparatory course, and

the opportunity to work unhampered, in segregated groups, such as are now being formed in many secondary schools under the concept of the honor school. (Hollingworth, 1939a, p. 97)

Hollingworth suggested that students above 150 IQ required additional enrichment to the college preparatory classes. Perhaps the continuation of units within the scope of the evolution of common things warranted further investigation at the high school level. Or, conceivably, a student might learn not only a profession but a manual trade while in high school in order “to be capable of serving society and themselves in more than one specialized vocation, as was and is actually the case with many able Americans, reared and educated under pioneering conditions of the nineteenth century and earlier” (Hollingworth, 1939a, p. 99).

Hollingworth’s last article before her death in 1939 addressed the identification and education of future leaders who were to be found in the population of gifted students. “Whatever may be his other qualities, if a person is stupid he will not be wanted as a leader” (Hollingworth, 1939b, p. 575). She felt that intelligence was a strong indicator of possible leadership ability (Hollingworth, 1939b).

She also thought emotional education might even be more paramount than pure intellectual training. Hollingworth identified five behaviors that would hinder the full development of leadership: “(1) to find enough hard and interesting work at school, (2) to suffer fools gladly, (3) to keep from becoming negativistic toward authority, (4) keep from becoming hermits, (5) to avoid the habits of extreme chicanery” (Hollingworth, 1939b, p. 586). Situations presented themselves on a daily basis in which class discussions

ensued over how to handle certain problems. Hollingworth proposed a fund from which gifted children could borrow money for their education, to be paid back so that they would not waste their talent and intellect.

“The chief problem of education is to give them instruction and training that will fully occupy and interest them into the company of pupils so much older than themselves that social contact is impossible” (Hollingworth, 1936, p. 89). Educators were deemed guardians of gifted children, and it was their responsibility to ensure that this group not be “lost in the vastness of mass education” (Hollingworth, 1939a, p. 99).

By building on the work of others and Hollingworth’s own research and efforts on behalf of gifted students, some of the first documented research-based practices for gifted children were established. She identified acceleration and enrichment as qualitatively different curricular strategies for gifted students in opposition to the seat work and rote memorization that was commonplace in most American schools during the first half of the 20th century. Unquestionably, her work has allowed those in gifted education to continue to build and refine what is best for gifted children in the classroom. **GCT**

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