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BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

P.R.O.D.I.G.Y.

Project for Research On Development of Intensely Gifted Youth

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Statement of Purpose

Children of prodigious ability have the potential to offer to society a life-long productivity and enrichment for themselves and the culture at large. Starting early in life, they are among the most significant innovators and artists, creative thinkers, and scholars of each generation.

As adults, sadly, many of these children never reach the levels of productive creativity that their youth portended. Those who do (as well as those who do not) are often deeply scarred by the inappropriate climate in which they are brought to maturity. Many astonishingly promising children do not continue to flourish after their fine start.

As the studies of Terman demonstrated, extraordinary abilities in childhood often turn out to be much more of a blight than a blessing. Exceptionally able children frequently become alienated from their age mates and from others. They often fail to learn ordinary skills of diligent application, problem solving, and socialization. In the long run, many become more impaired than some so-called "handicapped" persons. There is emerging evidence that prodigious abilities are more widespread than currently recognized because those endowed with such gifts often learn to conceal aptitudes and perceptual abilities that cause conflict with, and rejection by, others. Hiding such gifts is not merely a personal tragedy. Society needs the contribution of all of its members, including the highly endowed. We would all be poorer had the gifts of Newton, Mozart, Einstein, and Jesse Owens been smothered by the process that regularly stifles so many others.

In each generation there are many more children capable of this rich productivity than are identified as "child prodigies." Further, among the total population of potentially prodigious persons the attrition at various developmental levels is unacceptably high because of adverse influences which the child of prodigious talents cannot withstand since withall, he is a child emotionally and developmentally.

The deeper understanding of this segment of the population holds the opportunity for a better understanding of the potential and realities of the entire population. What is learned about efficient and appropriate stimulation of high capacity learners and creators applies not only to them but to all children. What is learned about the variations in psychological and biological capacities in the prodigiously able will enable us to explore similar, perhaps more subtle, variations in the rest of the population. Our exceptionally gifted children differ from others in the magnitude of their gifts. They are still our children and, fundamentally, more similar to our other children than dissimilar.

This project has five primary objectives.

Generation of Information

Virtually no factual information exists concerning the origins, incidence, cognitive and developmental patterns, specific hazards, problems and factors which facilitate or inhibit the development of a child prodigy's full potential. It is a primary goal of this project to provide comprehensive understanding of the varieties of prodigious development from multiple points of observation.

Establishment of Service Network

A second primary object is the establishment of a service network which will meet the educational, social, emotional, and developmental needs of this unserved and vitally important population. This segment of the project will also allow an unparalleled opportunity to gather data and refine our understanding of the phenomena under scrutiny.

Intervention

The third primary objective is the prevention of the "failed prodigy" syndrome. When a child is subject to emotional, educational, social and/or developmental abuse and neglect relative to his specific needs

as a child prodigy he is vulnerable to developmental hazards which may result in the loss of his productive and prodigious functioning. Preventive and remedial intervention, as well as appropriate environmental manipulation, will be designed to reduce this costly and tragic loss.

Augmentation of Prodigious Population

The fourth primary objective is the clarification of those factors which engender and/or facilitate the development of greater numbers of potentially prodigious children. This information will be tested and disseminated in order to increase the number of productive prodigiously able individuals in the society.

Dissemination of Information

Prodigious children elicit a wide variety of responses. Many of these are hostile and unfavorable ones based on stereotypes and lack of information. An enlightened awareness of needs and options applicable to child prodigies is to be hoped for through exposure to new and relevant information about this population. The generation of a more favorable climate of public opinion is the fifth primary objective of this project.