

**REPORT OF THE**  
**JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE STUDYING THE STATUS AND**  
**NEEDS OF GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN**  
**TO**  
**THE GOVERNOR**  
**AND**  
**THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



**HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 26**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA**  
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**1981**

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**Joan S. Jones**  
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**STAFF**

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**Brenda H. Edwards, Legislative Research Associate**  
**Robin M. Whitaker, Secretary**

**Administrative and Clerical**

**Office of Clerk, Senate of Virginia**

**Office of Clerk, House of Delegates**

**Report of the  
Joint Subcommittee Studying The Status And  
Needs Of Gifted And Talented Children  
To  
The Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia  
Richmond, Virginia  
February, 1981**

To: Honorable John N. Dalton, Governor of Virginia  
and  
The General Assembly of Virginia

The 1980 General Assembly passed House Joint Resolution No. 164 which requested that a joint subcommittee of the Education Committee of the House of Delegates and the Education and Health Committee of the Senate be established to study the status and needs of gifted and talented school children in the Commonwealth. The text of House Joint Resolution No. 164 is as follows:

**HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 164**

Requesting the House Education Committee and the Senate Education and Health Committee to study the status and needs for gifted and talented children.

**Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 18, 1980**

**Agreed to by the Senate, February 28, 1980**

WHEREAS, gifted children are among the greatest assets of the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, their talents should be encouraged and developed as much as possible; and

WHEREAS, the standards of quality for the public schools recognize the educational needs of gifted children by requiring school divisions to identify these children, and to offer them differentiated instructional opportunities to stimulate the development of their abilities; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring That the House Education Committee and the Senate Education and Health Committee are requested to study the status and needs of programs for the gifted and talented children and to submit any recommendations to the nineteen hundred eight-one session of the General Assembly.

The joint subcommittee was appointed from the membership of the Education Committee of the House of Delegates and the Education and Health Committee of the Senate by the respective chairmen. The members were: Delegate James A. Davis of Ferrum; Delegate Alan A. Diamonstein of Newport News; Delegate V. Thomas Forehand, Jr. of Chesapeake; Delegate Robison B. James of Richmond; Delegate Joan S. Jones of Lynchburg; Senator John H. Chichester of Fredericksburg; and Senator Stanley C. Walker of Norfolk. Delegate Alan A. Diamonstein served as chairman.

The joint subcommittee held several meetings during the interim and received testimony from many professional and lay associations interested in gifted education, several school divisions, educators of the gifted, parents, recognized experts in gifted education, and the Department of Education.

**The Gifted and Talented**

Gifted and talented students constitute a largely unidentified minority. This group of students cuts across all economic, social, racial, cultural, age, sex, and occupational segments of society. This population can be defined as the upper three to five percent of school age children and youth who demonstrate outstanding promise in general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative and productive thinking, psychomotor ability, leadership and achievement in the visual and performing arts. Such children require differential educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided in the regular school program.

Giftedness is not limited to a single area although a gifted individual may gain recognition for his contributions within a specialty. Achievement is probably the area in which the gifted and talented are most frequently recognized. Studies in this area have uniformly agreed that these individuals function at levels far in advance of their age mates. For example, in a statewide study of 1,000 gifted children at all grade levels, the kindergarten group on the average performed at a level comparable so that of second grade children in reading and mathematics; the average for fourth and fifth grade gifted students in all curriculum areas was beyond that of seventh grade pupils; nearly three-fourths of such eighth grade pupils made average scores equal or beyond the average twelfth graders in six curriculum areas, and three-fourths of the tenth and eleventh grade gifted students exceeded the average of college sophomores. Throughout his school experience, the gifted student typically functions at a level of those who are several years his senior.

### Characteristics of the Gifted and Talented

#### General characteristics

They typically learn to read earlier with a better comprehension of the nuances of the language. As many as half of the gifted and talented population have learned to read before entering school. They often read widely, quickly, and intensely and have large vocabularies.

They commonly learn basic skills better, more quickly, and with less practice.

They are better able to construct and handle abstractions than their age mates.

They are frequently able to pick up and interpret nonverbal cues and can draw inferences which other children have to have spelled out for them.

They take less for granted, seeking the "hows" and "why".

They display a better ability to work independently at an earlier age and for longer periods of time than other children.

They can sustain longer periods of concentration and attention.

Their interests are often both widely eclectic and intensely focused.

They frequently have seemingly boundless energy, which sometimes leads to a misdiagnosis of "hyperactive".

They are usually able to respond and relate well to parents, teachers and other adults. They may prefer the company of older children and adults to that of their peers.

#### Creative characteristics

They are fluent thinkers, able to produce a large quantity of possibilities, consequences, or related ideas.

They are flexible thinkers, able to use many different alternatives and approaches to problem solving.

They are original thinkers, seeking new, unusual, or unconventional associations and combinations among items of information. They also have an ability to see relationships among seemingly unrelated objects, ideas, or fact.

They are elaborative thinkers, producing new steps, ideas, responses, or other embellishments to a basic idea, situation, or problem.

They show a willingness to entertain complexity and seem to thrive in problem situations.

They are good guessers and can construct hypotheses or "what if" questions readily.

**They often are aware of their own impulsiveness and the irrationality within themselves and show emotional sensitivity.**

**They have a high level of curiosity about objects, ideas, situations or events.**

**They often display intellectual playfulness, fantasize and imagine readily.**

**They can be less intellectually inhibited than their peers in expressing opinions and ideas and often exhibit spirited disagreement.**

**They have a sensitivity to beauty and are attracted to aesthetic dimensions.**

### **Learning characteristics**

**Gifted and talented children often show keen powers of observation, exhibit a sense of the significant, and have any eye for important details.**

**They often read a great deal on their own, preferring books and magazines written for youngsters older than themselves.**

**They take great pleasure in intellectual activity.**

**They have well developed powers of abstraction, conceptualization and synthesizing abilities.**

**They have rapid insight into cause-effect relationships.**

**They tend to like structure, organization and consistency in their environment. They may resent violation of structure and rules.**

**They display a questioning attitude and seek information for the sake of having it as much as for its instrumental value.**

**They are often skeptical, critical and evaluative. They are quick to spot inconsistencies.**

**They often have a large storehouse of information regarding a variety of topics which they can recall quickly.**

**They show a ready grasp of underlying principles and can often make valid generalizations about events, people or objects.**

**They readily perceive similarities, differences, and anomalies.**

**They often attack complicated material by separating it into its components and analyzing it systematically.**

**They have a well developed common sense.**

### **Behavioral characteristics**

**They are willing to examine the unusual and are highly inquisitive.**

**Their behavior is often well organized, goal directed and efficient with respect to tasks and problems.**

**They exhibit an intrinsic motivation to learn, find out, or explore and are often very persistent. "I'd rather do it myself" is a common attitude.**

**They enjoy learning new things and new ways of doing things.**

**They have a longer attention and concentration span than their peers.**

**They are more independent and less subject to peer pressure than their age mates. They are**

able to be conforming or nonconforming as the situation demands

They have a highly developed moral and ethical sense.

They are able to integrate opposing impulses, such as constructive and destructive behavior.

They often exhibit daydreaming behavior.

They may seek to conceal their abilities so as not to "stick out".

They often have a well developed sense of self and a realistic idea about their capabilities and potential.<sup>1</sup>

### **Identification of the Gifted and Talented**

Identification of gifted and talented students is a major problem in developing programs for them. It is important that these students be identified early. At the time of school entry, students are encouraged to conform and may hide superior talents and work at a minimum level of efficiency and accomplishment. For the gifted child, this actually is regression. If not discovered early and reinforced, gifts and talents could become lost or children may not develop the attitudes and motivation needed to make full use of their abilities. Discovery of talent is a continual process that must begin early and continue throughout a child's educational career. It is a mistaken notion that a bright mind will make its own way; rather, intellectual and creative talent can not survive educational neglect and apathy. These students cannot excel without assistance.

Human potential expresses itself across a broad spectrum of specific abilities. Identifying gifts and talents, other than intellectual ability, is a relatively unidentified diagnostic skill. A successful program includes: early identification, continuing search, involvement of various professionals, use of multiple resource materials and complete information of the abilities of the gifted student. The methods used in screening may include: intelligence and achievement testing; nominations by teachers, parents, peers, and self; creativity testing; and identification by experts in special areas. Intelligence testing is most often used as a first level screening of the intellectually gifted. The Stanford-Binet Intelligence test and Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised are considered to be among the best instruments currently available for identifying such children on an individual basis. However, E. P. Torrance has described ways for identifying the creative gifted through his techniques of observing child behavior. Strengths in the following areas may indicate exceptional creativity. The areas are:

Ability to express feelings and emotions.

Ability to improvise with commonplace materials and objects.

Articulateness in role playing, socio-drama and story telling.

Enjoyment of and ability in visual arts, such as drawing, painting, and sculpture.

Enjoyment of and ability in creative movement, dance and dramatics.

Enjoyment of and ability in instrumental and vocal music and music rhythm.

Use of expressive speech.

Fluency and flexibility in figural media.

Enjoyment of and skills in group activities and problem solving.

Responsiveness to the concrete.

Responsiveness to the kinesthetic.

Expressiveness of gestures and body language and the ability to interpret body language.

Humor

Richness of imagery and informal language

Originality of ideas in problem solving

Problem centeredness or persistence in problem solving

Emotional responsiveness

Quickness of warm-up.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Culturally Diverse Gifted and Talented and the Gifted and Talented Handicapped**

#### **The Culturally Diverse**

Another problem in identifying the gifted and talented is the identification of the culturally diverse gifted and talented, and the gifted handicapped. As these populations have frequently been overlooked, their gifts remain unidentified and underestimated. The culturally diverse gifted and talented are generally the Black, American Indian, Mexican American, Asian American, and Puerto Rican students. Their behavior patterns and responses often vary from the typical indicators of giftedness and talent such as high I.Q. scores or proficiency in the dominant language. The following are some problems in identifying the culturally diverse:

Often these children are overlooked in the identification process. While particular talents may be observable, their intellectual ability and potential may be neglected, obscured by a cultural veil, or dismissed. These children are often penalized when assessed by instruments normed on the dominant culture.

We often mistakenly assume that culturally diverse children are alike: since they belong to an identifiable group, we assume they must all share the same characteristics. They should be seen as individuals.

When the behavior of culturally diverse gifted and talented children is interpreted, their boredom with already learned or irrelevant material is often interpreted as anti-intellectual. Dissatisfaction expressed as disruptive or impulsive behavior reinforces misperceptions. The desire to accept challenges may be seen as aggressive or unrealistic.

Preoccupation with the ethnicity or social characteristics of the group from which the child comes may blind us to potential. Attention is diverted from the variation in ability among individuals (especially the upper end of the performance scale) and the characteristics of low-achievers are applied to the group as a whole, including its gifted and talented members.<sup>3</sup>

#### **The Handicapped**

The gifted and talented handicapped are those persons with outstanding ability or potential, despite their handicaps such as visual, hearing or orthopedic impairments; emotional disturbances; or learning disabilities. They require educational programs which take into consideration their giftedness and talent and their handicap.

As the handicap is more easily recognized, the handicapping condition often disguises or obscures the individual's gifts and talents. This often results in inappropriate educational placement. The basic problem in identifying such individuals is removing the mask that the disability can place over intellectual ability, talent and creativity. One way to improve the identification of such persons is the education of parents and educators to discern potential. Some identification techniques include:

biographical information

behavioral checklists (ways in which the handicapped person responds to situations; coping mechanisms which they may have developed for their disability).

play observation records (behavior in less structural situations, e.g., peer relationships; creativity; leadership qualities).

The following persons are prominent examples of handicapped individuals who have displayed remarkable gifts or talents:

Helen Keller – blind, deaf and mute

Leonardo da Vince – learning disabled

Franklin D. Roosevelt – orthopedically handicapped

Stevie Wonder – blind

Ludwig Von Beethoven – deaf

### **Education of the Gifted and Talented in Virginia**

Programs for the gifted and talented are mandated by the General Assembly through the Standards of Quality (Standard 5 of the 1980-82 Standards of Quality). The Board of Education approved the Virginia Plan for Gifted and Talented in January, 1980. The purpose of the Plan is to actualize the intent of the Standards of Quality and the Gifted and Talented Children's Act of 1978, P.L. 95-561, and to provide a framework within which the Department of Education can furnish leadership and assistance to school divisions and private schools in the area of gifted and talented education. These programs are funded primarily by the State with the other source of funds stemming from federal aid. State funding operates on the basis of reimbursement. School divisions receive an additional payment for each student in Average Daily Membership (ADM) who qualifies for and is enrolled in a program for gifted and talented students. The number of students for whom reimbursement is made can not exceed four percent of the total number of students in ADM in the school division. For the 1980-82 biennium, payment is sixty dollars per eligible student per year. To receive State funds, each school division must submit a Letter of Intent Report which provides verification that the expenditure of State funds are used (1) for the operation of the program, (2) to provide services to students in the program during the year in which reimbursement is requested, (3) to sustain the program, and (4) to maintain and account for the funds in an identifiable manner. In addition, federal funds are distributed under P.L. 95-561, the Gifted and Talented Children's Education Act. Funds are distributed to participating school divisions on a competitive basis. The maximum amount awarded to school divisions that submit proposals is five thousand dollars per school division.

### **The Governor's School for the Gifted**

The Governor's School for the Gifted was established by the General Assembly in 1973 to provide special schooling of gifted children. The school is designed for approximately 420 juniors and seniors of public and private schools who are academically gifted or creatively talented. Selection of students to attend the School is by nomination, though nomination is not the sole criterion for selection. To date, over 3,000 students have participated in the program.

### **Findings of the Subcommittee on Staff Development**

During the course of the joint subcommittee's work, areas of need in gifted education in the Commonwealth were identified. It was the consensus of the joint subcommittee that staff development was the most urgent need. The chairman appointed a subcommittee to study the specific problems in this area. Members of the subcommittee were: Dr. Carolyn M. Callahan, professor of education of the gifted at the University of Virginia and a recognized national expert in this field; Mrs. Mary L. Passage, Supervisor of Secondary Education and Coordinator of Gifted Programs, Newport News Public Schools; and Dr. Joseph R. White, Associate Director of Gifted Programs, Department of Education.

The subcommittee investigated the needs of gifted and talented students and the staff of such programs. It reviewed the requirements for instructional personnel of programs for the gifted in other states. Most of the states which were reviewed require persons responsible for the education



of the gifted to have special preparation to work with such students.

The subcommittee found that through the education of gifted and talented students is required, the preparation of educational personnel having responsibility for the instruction of such students and for the administration of such programs has not been addressed adequately.

Gifted and talented students require differentiated education programs and services beyond those normally provided in the regular school program. Intellectual and creative talent cannot survive educational neglect and apathy. The teacher is the key to effective programs for the gifted and talented; therefore teachers should have special preparation to teach such students. Likewise, persons who are responsible for the supervision and administration of programs for the gifted and talented should be knowledgeable of the needs of these students and their learning styles and should have experience in working with them.

The subcommittee determined that there is a need for all instructional, supervisory and administrative personnel of programs for the gifted to be specially prepared to work such students. The joint subcommittee agreed with this finding and its recommendations are based, in part, on it.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations of the joint subcommittee are as follows:

1. Local school divisions should assume responsibility for providing staff development for educators of the gifted and talented through in-service training programs in specific areas unique to their own school systems.

Gifted education has presented a challenging venture to school divisions in Virginia. Meeting the needs of gifted children has required the preparation of teachers for new roles. Local school divisions differ widely in their programs for the gifted and talented and, consequently, in their needs for teacher preparation. Growth in student performance and attitudes will result from improving the way teachers perform in the classroom; therefore, staff development should be highly experiential. The need for an individualized and experiential staff development program can best be accomplished locally. Individual teachers can then be prepared in specific areas unique to their own school system. In-service training of teachers can best be done by those individuals whose principal responsibility is to direct, coordinate and supervise staff development for division personnel.

The sequence of staff development for teachers of gifted and talented is seen as a three-phase program. Any teacher of the gifted and talented must begin with introductory courses. Having completed this training, the teacher will move to intermediate training, followed by advanced training. Staff development for teachers must provide training and experiences which will enable the teacher to:

demonstrate personal growth and development in understanding the nature of gifted and talented students;

implement a program consonant with the stated goals of the school division program for gifted and talented students;

progress through a diversity of alternatives at the introductory, intermediate, or advance level of professional training for education of the gifted and talented;

and relate theory and application in a practical way to meet the needs of gifted and talented students.

2. The courses currently required by the Department of Education for certification should include components dealing with the identification, psychology, and education of the gifted and talented.

The teacher is the most important factor in establishing an environment conducive to learning in the formal education setting. The teacher of the gifted and talented should possess certain competencies to meet the needs of such students and should serve primarily as a facilitator of

learning. At present, because there is no endorsement in gifted and talented education, there are no specific training requirements for teachers of the gifted and talented. Exposure to courses which include components of the identification, psychology, and education of the gifted and talented will help ensure that those who work with gifted and talented guide the students in higher conceptualization processes and provide educational settings which allow students a full range of expression.

Justification for the inclusion of the study of gifted and talented children in the curricular experience of all prospective teachers is premised on two major arguments. The first of these arguments is that appropriate education of the gifted and talented rests on appropriate identification. Many school divisions employ teacher nomination and teacher rating in their procedures for identifying gifted and talented students. In order for the regular classroom teacher to carry out these functions adequately, he or she must be cognizant of the characteristics of the gifted and talented student and be aware of behavioral manifestations of these characteristics. Without specific training many teachers are unable to carry out their responsibilities in identifying the gifted.

The second argument is based on an examination of the role of the regular classroom teacher in existing programs for the gifted and talented. The major models used are: resource rooms or pull-out programs, acceleration, or cluster-grouping/mainstreaming within classroom programs. Each of these models is in some way dependent upon a regular classroom teacher for maximum benefit to the gifted or talented child. In the resource room or pull-out program model, the regular classroom teacher is still responsible for the major portion of the instructional program for these children. Because the characteristic traits of advanced achievement do not disappear when the child returns to the classroom, the regular classroom teacher must have skills in identifying appropriate goals, diagnosing the educational needs of the gifted and planning appropriate curricula materials and instructional strategies for the children during that period of time the child is in the regular classroom.

In an acceleration model, the gifted child is dependent on regular classroom teachers for instruction. In this case, a child is either advanced through grade-skipping, early admission, or individually guided education programs. Too often, after the acceleration move, teachers continue to teach these children at the same pace even though they have demonstrated the ability to learn at a faster rate. As before, the need for skills in more appropriate diagnosis, instruction and evaluation is needed by the teacher who works with accelerated students.

Finally, a teacher who works with students in a mainstreamed or within-classroom program has total responsibility for the educational program of a very unique child. Therefore, this teacher needs skills in planning individual programs to meet the needs of these children in achievement of both basic skills and in enriched, more complex and abstract fields.

Professional preparation of teachers of the gifted and talented must provide instruction and experiences which will enable the teacher to:

possess knowledge of the cognitive, social and emotional development of the gifted and talented;

demonstrate a knowledge of the nature and needs of the gifted and talented in general and those unique to each subgroup of giftedness;

identify and develop program prototypes that meet the needs of gifted and talented students;

demonstrate a knowledge of curriculum models for the education of gifted and talented;

design curriculum materials which allow the gifted and talented to progress at an individual rate and style of learning; and

evaluate the achievement of gifted and talented students.

Because current teacher education programs in Virginia fail to provide the instruction necessary for prospective teachers to identify, recognize the needs of, or plan appropriate instruction for the gifted and talented, it is recommended that courses required by the Department of Education for certification include instruction in these areas in order that classroom teachers might obtain the needed skills to work effectively with such children.

3. The Department of Education should provide through whatever means deemed by the Department as most effective field consultation to school divisions in the Commonwealth in establishing and maintaining programs for the gifted and talented.

The current position in the Department of Education assigned to Office of Special Programs for Gifted and Talented and charged with the development of programs for the gifted and talented in the Commonwealth carries with it responsibility for organizing and implementing the Governor's School as well as the responsibility for maintaining paperwork and monitoring functions required for State reimbursement of school divisions. These administrative duties severely restrict the amount of time that can be spent with school divisions in giving on-site, specific consultation on program planning, identification, curriculum planning, and instructional planning and implementation. Such field services are sorely needed by local school divisions. Training of administrators and teachers in planning and implementing these programs has been limited to only a few school divisions fortunate enough to have received federal funds to attend training programs. Further, this area of programming is relatively new to Virginia, funds for in-service training are severely limited, and the funds provided for maintaining programs cover only basic operating expenses at best. If, in fact, there is real expectation that quality programs will be developed throughout the Commonwealth, individual school divisions will need direct, consultative services to help them design and implement programs specific to their needs. The most cost-efficient means appears to be provision of field services by the Department of Education.

4. The Department of Education should study the feasibility of establishing residential schools for the arts, humanities, and science for the gifted and talented.

In 1973 the General Assembly appropriated funds for the purpose of assisting the establishment of Statewide projects for special schooling of the gifted and talented. Education of these students is now required by the Standards of Quality. The Governor's School for the Gifted was established as a result of funding provided by the 1973 General Assembly. Although the Governor's School has benefited many gifted and talented students, it cannot begin to serve all of the gifted and talented students in the Commonwealth due to its limited space and duration. The Department of Education has considered augmenting the Governor's School. Given the augmentation of the School, it still would not serve the needs and numbers of gifted and talented students as would a school. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider establishing residential schools for the arts, humanities, and sciences for the gifted and talented.

5. The Department of Education is requested to consider the concept of indexing the funding of gifted and talented education as is currently being considered for special education and vocational education.

6. The Department of Education is requested to re-evaluate the procedure of establishing the number of pupils eligible for State funding of gifted and talented education.

7. The Department of Education is requested to increase funding for gifted and talented education.

Programs for the gifted and talented are funded primarily by the State on a reimbursement basis. School divisions receive an additional payment of fifty-dollars for each student in Average Daily Membership (ADM) who has been identified as gifted or talented and is enrolled in a program for such students. Federal funds are the other source of aid. While the State reimbursement cannot exceed four percent of the total number of students in ADM in a school division, and while \$1,546,615 was appropriated by the General Assembly and targeted to serve only three percent of such students, school divisions have reported that approximately five percent of the ADM were served in some manner by these programs during the 1979-80 school year. There is a radiating effect from gifted and talented programs which benefits all students.

It is the consensus of the joint subcommittee that the time has come for an emphasis on gifted education, therefore, it is necessary to study the feasibility of increasing the funding and the facilities of such programs.

In order to prepare for the complexities of this decade, education must look to preparing our future leaders.

### **Conclusion**

In view of the radiating effects of gifted programs and the need for educating tomorrow's leaders, consideration should be given to removing the ceiling on funding gifted and talented programs or indexing the funding of gifted education as is being considered for special education and vocational education.

The joint subcommittee is appreciative of the assistance and support of all persons who contributed to its study, in particular, Mrs. Mary L. Passage, Dr. Carolyn M. Callahan, and Dr. Joseph R. White.

The Department of Education's contribution to the work of the joint subcommittee was invaluable. The joint subcommittee is appreciative of and commends the continued cooperation and assistance of Dr. S. John Davis, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the staff of the Department of Education.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan A. Diamonstein, Chairman  
John H. Chichester  
James A. Davis  
V. Thomas Forehand, Jr.  
Robison B. James  
Joan S. Jones  
Stanley C. Walker

### Footnotes

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2. Nazzaro, Jean N., "Identification of the Gifted and Talented Child", prepared for the Office of Gifted and Talented, U.S. Office of Education. (Virginia: The Council for Exceptional Children), 1978.
3. Frasier, Mary A., "The Culturally Diverse Gifted and Talented Child", prepared for the Office of Gifted and Talented, U.S. Office of Education. (Virginia: The Council for Exceptional Children), 1978.
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