



Rethinking Gifted Education. James H. Borland, ed. New York: Teachers College Press, 2003. 294 pp.

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Times have changed and so has gifted education, contends James Borland, editor of *Rethinking Gifted Education*, a publication of the Education and Psychology of the Gifted Series. But, the changes in field of gifted education have not been totally deliberate and voluntary. Calls for changes have often faced much resistance from professionals and parents of gifted children who contend that retaining the conventional gifted education paradigm is necessary for gifted children to reach their potential. Critics within and outside of gifted education maintain that it remains largely a self-sustaining inequitable educational system that “over-enroll[s] White middle-class and upper-middle-class students,” (p. 2) while continuing to underenroll minority students. Moreover, they argue, the concept of giftedness, like the concept of intelligence, is socially constructed, and “gains its meaning, even its existence, from peoples’ interactions, especially their discourse” (p. 107), and, therefore, it continues to perpetuate white privilege and educational inequality. Borland, well aware of these arguments and of the fact that 25 years has elapsed since the first publication of this series, realized as well that the field of gifted education has been stagnant and that time had come to critically reexamine its prevailing theories and practices--even though many in the field disagree and subtly resist. Consequently, he invited prominent and veteran educators and researchers such as David Feldman, John Feldhusen, and Joyce Van Tassel-Baska and relatively new and outstanding scholars in the field such as Mary Anne Heng and Mara Sapon-Shevin to collectively and critically rethink gifted education, hence, the book’s title, *Rethinking Gifted Education*.

To accomplish the challenging task of rethinking gifted education, the book is divided into three sections. The first section, “Reconceptualizations of Giftedness,” was a bit disappointing because, except for Borland’s chapter, “The Death of Giftedness: Gifted Education without Gifted Children,” and Tracy Cross’s chapter, “Rethinking Gifted Education: A Phenomenological Critique of the Politics and Assumptions of the Empirical-Analytic Mode of Inquiry,” a critical examination and rethinking of gifted education was absent. Rather, the majority of the discussion was based on traditional or mainstream conceptualizations of giftedness and its identification and implementation in schools. The opening chapter in this section--“A Developmental, Evolutionary Perspective on Giftedness”--purported to propose a framework to “help the field integrate its considerable achievements from the first century of effort into a vision for the future that ensures its vitality,” (p. 9) but it hits far from its intended



mark. Quite the contrary, Feldman, the author of this chapter, appears to comfortably embrace a color-blind ideology and perspective in gifted education and does not present any new and radical ideas. As well, he fails to consider what Mara Sapon-Shevin argues in chapter 8: “[It] is not that children do not differ in many dimensions—clearly they do—but that decision about how to define the category [of gifted], where to make “cut off” points, and how to discriminate between those in and outside the category are ethical and political decisions highly influenced by values; beliefs about children, intelligence, and education; and the cultural and economic content” (p. 130).

“Gifted Education and Equity,” the book’s second section, includes three works, the most illuminating and sweeping of which is Mara Sapon-Shevin’s chapter (mentioned above), in which she eloquently and fearlessly questions some of the most fundamental notions and practices in gifted education. Although she does not argue for the elimination of gifted education, she clearly calls for a reexamination and transformation of gifted education that addresses inequality and injustices, specifically calling for an agenda that benefits all children, rather than a privileged few.

The last section of the book, “The Practice of Gifted Education—Identification, Curriculum, and Programming,” focuses on policy, curriculum, and practices in gifted education. The purpose of these works is to critically reexamine current pedagogy, curriculum approaches, and practices to advance the field, but they fail to do this. For instance, much of the discussion by Joyce VanTassel-Baska and Sally Reis is a recycle of traditional gifted education concepts of instructional and curriculum approaches and practices. In particular, Reis’s essay, based on her own experiences as “an advanced learner [who] suffered from boredom for years” (p. 187), initially argues for “a commitment to address issues such as underachievement, a commitment to investing in the identification and programming for culturally diverse gifted students, and a reconsideration of identification procedures for all gifted students” (p. 187). However, she introduces no convincing arguments to do so. At one point she advocates for the use of gifted pedagogy as a means for creating a challenging education for all children, and then immediately argues against this by stating “little research exists on whether this can be implemented” (p. 199). Reis, like many of the book authors, continues to argue about the shape and focus of gifted education, but not about their existence and therefore fails to provide an objective and deep critical analysis that is important for a genuine analysis of gifted education’s potential.

In summary, *Rethinking Gifted Education* has a notable and highly needed goal of rethinking gifted education. However, the majority of its chapters continue to perpetuate the traditional monocultural mainstream theories of giftedness and conventional, outdated “wisdoms” about gifted education. I hear only a few brave and



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extraordinary voices willing to take a serious and critical look at gifted education. Alas, if these essays are representative of the future of gifted education, it is quite possible that not much will change in the next 25 years.

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