

Cambridge University Press  
052183841X - Conceptions of Giftedness, Second Edition  
Edited by Robert J. Sternberg and Janet E. Davidson  
Frontmatter  
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## Conceptions of Giftedness

Second Edition

What does it really mean to be gifted and how can schools or other institutions identify, teach, and evaluate the performance of gifted children? Gifted education is a crucial aspect of schooling in the United States and abroad. Most countries around the world have at least some form of gifted education. With the first edition becoming a major work in the field of giftedness, this second edition of *Conceptions of Giftedness* aims to describe the major conceptions of what it means to be gifted and how these conceptions apply to the identification, instruction, and assessment of the gifted. It will provide specialists with a critical evaluation of various theories of giftedness, give practical advice to teachers and administrators on how to put theories of gifted education into practice, and enable the major researchers in the field to compare and contrast the strengths of their theoretical models.

Robert J. Sternberg, PhD, is IBM Professor of Psychology and Education at Yale University and Director of the PACE Center at Yale. He was the 2003 President of the American Psychological Association. He is the author of more than 1,000 publications on topics related to cognition and intelligence. He has won numerous awards from professional associations and holds five honorary doctorates.

Janet E. Davidson is Associate Professor of Psychology at Lewis & Clark College, where she won the Professor of the Year award in 1997. She does research on several aspects of giftedness, including the roles that insight and metacognitive skills play in gifted problem-solving performance. In 1988, she won a Mensa Education and Research Foundation Award for Excellence.

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Edited by

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## Preface

Emanuel Feuermann was hired to the faculty of the University of Cologne at the age of 16 to teach the cello to students, all of whom were older than he was. He was a child prodigy who made good and became a superstar as an adult. In contrast, his brother, Sigmund Feuermann, was an even more amazing child prodigy than was Emanuel. But by the age of 31, Sigmund returned to his parents' home in Vienna in semiretirement. His career as a mature violinist had been, to a large extent, a bust. What is it that distinguishes gifted children who later go on to become gifted adults from those who do not? Indeed, what does it even mean to be gifted, and how can schools or other institutions identify, teach, and evaluate the performance of gifted children?

Gifted education is a crucial aspect of schooling in the United States and abroad. Most countries around the world have at least some form of gifted education. To help those with an interest in the field of gifted education, we edited a volume that was published in 1986 by Cambridge University Press, *Conceptions of Giftedness*. However, that book has been out of print for several years. Since the book went out of print, the senior editor of this volume has received many requests for permission to copy material from that book and also for a new edition of the book. This book is that new, second edition.

This book describes the major conceptions of what it means to be gifted and how these conceptions apply to the identification, instruction, and assessment of the gifted.

There are several reasons, we believe, for a book on conceptions of giftedness:

1. *Need for theoretical guidance.* Although there are many gifted programs, the large majority of them continue to be based on no theory in particular. Rather, they use off-the-shelf measures, such as tests of intelligence, creativity, or achievement, without any clear motivation

in the choice of tests. A book such as this one would help specialists in the field of giftedness choose a model with which to work.

2. *Need for translation of conceptions of giftedness into practice.* In retrospect, the first edition of the book probably overemphasized theory at the expense of information regarding how theory can be put into practice. Because the large majority of readers of the book are likely to be teachers, it is important that the book emphasize application in addition to theory. Translation into practice needs to deal with identification procedures, instructional methods, and instruments for assessment of achievement in gifted individuals.
3. *Need for comparison of conceptions.* Theorists often present their own work without giving full consideration to how their work compares with that of others. Yet, in order to evaluate competing conceptions, teachers of the gifted need to know the similarities and differences among the conceptions. They cannot be expected to figure out these similarities and differences on their own.

#### WHY PUBLISH A SECOND EDITION?

Since 1986, the field has changed, as have some of the major contributors to it. We therefore believe that the time is ripe for this second edition of *Conceptions of Giftedness*, which reflects the current state of the field.

Each author was asked to address the following five questions in his or her chapter, as well as any other questions he or she might wish to entertain:

1. What is giftedness?
2. How does your conception of giftedness compare with other conceptions?
3. How should gifted individuals be identified?
4. How should gifted individuals be instructed in school and elsewhere?
5. How should the achievement of gifted individuals be assessed?

You will find in this volume a wide range of views, from Borland's suggestion that we do not need a conception of giftedness, to Callahan and Miller's view that we need enhanced and more powerful conceptions. You, the reader, may choose, or come up with your own conception!

We have designed this book to be relevant to several potential audiences: students, teachers of the gifted, professors in gifted-education programs, parents of gifted children, and people who themselves have been labeled as gifted or believe they should have been. We hope you all enjoy and learn from our volume.

RJS

JED

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