



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2001 Volume VI: Human Intelligence: Theories and Developmental Origins

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## **Working with Children's Powers Not Their Handicaps**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 01.06.09  
by Robert P. Echter

In all cases our special education students are dealing with serious and extreme problems of one sort or another that impact their learning in school, by definition. That makes them a very heterogeneous group. Trying to solve all their problems simultaneously is complex and anything but regular. I have been a teacher 30 years mostly with a very wide range of special education students. In this paper I try to convey that the quality of relationship we have with our students has very important implications for whether they are able to reach a degree of facility with subject matter that will allow them to participate more fully in school and society. I describe and discuss what it means to take individuality seriously and forge a group ambience of social and intellectual learning. The emphasis is on what I have done in specific and concrete instances and why I acted as I did. It includes examples from teaching in areas of reading, writing and math as well as the pre-conventional learning phase. Both Caleb Gattegno and Seymour Sarason have personally influenced my thinking and my work.

(Recommended for Special Education/Literacy, Math, and Social Studies, grades K-12.)

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