

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS



Newsletter of the Conceptual Foundations Network of the National Association for Gifted Children

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Goodbye, Hello. The Ebb and Flow of Change

It seems to me that whenever one is in doubt of what themes are emerging from research or what interdisciplinary concept should unite lessons, a sure bet is “Change.” Change infuses all parts of life. The life of a NAGC network and the gifted field in general is no exception. In this issue of the newsletter we find ourselves discussing different aspects of change. We are changing from a division to a network. We are also learning of changes and clarifications of organizational structures and procedures as we adapt to new ways of choosing our network leaders. NAGC Executive Director Nancy Green shares details with us about these changes.

Conceptual Foundations has a mission to be open to changing ideas about studying giftedness. In this issue, Don Ambrose, Wenda Sheard, and Alexinia Baldwin each share unique ways in which we can expand our perspectives. However, some changes are more difficult than others. We are saddened by the passing of Michael Pyryt a wonderful person and friend to many Conceptual Foundations members. Yet, as life often works, in this issue we also welcome Elizabeth A. Romey into the CF leadership group. Goodbye to dear friends and hello to the possibility of new.

~ Erin Morris Miller, Editor

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS CHAIR

Abbey Block Cash, Ph.D.

Welcome and Program News

It is a pleasure to welcome all returning Conceptual Foundations Network Members (CF) as well as all new members. Our network continues to be a dedicated and unified group as exemplified by the many individuals who volunteered to do proposal reviews. Nora Cohen, the Program Chair, had many more reviewers than she could possibly use, and to be fair, she selected individuals on a first come basis. Thank you again for your generous efforts in the Network’s behalf. We received 48 proposals this year for the 2008 Conference, which is scheduled in Tampa, Florida October 30 through November 2. Nora and I swapped 8 of the proposals to other Networks that were not a good fit with our stated goals. Each proposal was slated to be reviewed 4 times in a blind review process.

The NAGC Programming Committee will be meeting in Bethesda on February 28 and February 29, and CF will be represented by two members of its programming committee: me and Cheryl Ackerman. Nora is away in Brazil but was integrally involved in the process before she left; I also want to acknowledge, with appreciation, the work of the other two members dealing with programming, Erin Morris Miller and Kathi Kearney.

Board Policy Changes:

During the Division Retreat in November, at the start of the Annual NAGC Convention, the leadership of all of the divisions came together to discuss many proposed changes, several of which have already been confirmed by NAGC's Board, and are currently in practice. Divisions are now formally called Networks and there are many new Network Convention Policies and Practices governing our current procedures. Among others, these include the use of a somewhat unified blind review process for all of the Networks which mandates that all proposals be reviewed, anonymously, at least 3 times. CF selected to have them reviewed by 4 separate individuals and used a rubric, which was devised to fit the needs of our network. While most Networks use the standard rubric provided by NAGC, a few others have selected to craft their own, as well. Other programming changes may include the evaluation of proposals offered at NAGC this fall, the monitoring of the number of participants attending the sessions, and a report completed by the Networks in December. However, it was agreed at the Network Retreat that this task would only be assumed by the Networks under the leadership and assistance of NAGC who would have to offer a coordinated system and the manpower to successfully organize this effort. The Networks will await further direction from NAGC on this issue.

Finally, NAGC is also considering creating at least one newsletter a year that contains articles and announcements from ALL of the Networks. If this occurs, we will be soliciting submissions from CF members. Of course, we will continue to create our own CF Newsletter.

Network Elections:

Beginning this September, all Network Elections will follow the same pattern and procedures. However, all **current** leadership positions will be honored, so that some of the Networks may not be in line until September of 2009. A Chair and a Chair Elect will govern each Network. Each position will be a two-year

term, and the Chair Elect is in line to automatically fill the Chair's position. However, if that cannot happen, a special election will be scheduled. Applications for these positions must be filled out by accessing the NAGC website www.nagc.org between February 15 and April 7. Voting is anticipated to take place between June 1 and June 30. Only current Network members will be permitted to vote for their respective Network leaders. In general, qualifications require that a candidate has been an active member of the Network that they seek to chair for a minimum of 3 years. Other required information includes: name, home address, phone, and e-mail address; current occupation, education, career highlights and history; NAGC participation, significant leadership roles, presentations, publications, and creative contributions; and a statement of candidacy. Please look at the information included elsewhere in this newsletter for additional proposed board policies regarding elections. These are the same ones I distributed last month via e-mail.

Currently, CF needs someone to run for Chair Elect in June 2008. According to my term of office, I will remain as Chair for the 2008-2009 year, transitioning the Chair Elect to take over during September 2009. This arrangement will require that a Chair Elect also run for office in June 2009, to provide a full complement of leaders. **I strongly encourage all interested candidates to get in touch with me and fill out the required form at your earliest convenience.**

CF also has other leaders who were nominated and supported at our annual business meeting, which was held last November. Our Program Chair is Nora Cohen, and her committee consists of Cheryl Ackerman, Kathi Kearney, and Erin Morris Miller. The new Membership Chair is Elizabeth Romey, and the Newsletter Chair is Erin Morris Miller.

Portraits in Gifted Education: Legacy Series:

The Legacy Series Committee is working on editing and creating the Annemarie Roeper video. We hope to have it available for

distribution within the next few months. We are also considering our next venture and how to proceed. We will require a larger committee to help handle all of the work this year, and we encourage people willing to contribute to our next videotaping project to get in touch with me. The committee will also be reviewing last year's experience. We realize that the evening time we selected for the event last year was not ideal. We encourage feedback on how to make this pilot program more successful in the future. All comments are welcomed.

Welcoming Our New Membership Chair:

CF is fortunate to have Elizabeth A. Romey, Assistant Professor of Gifted/Special/Leadership/Teacher Education, from the University of South Alabama, as our membership chair this year. Elizabeth will be putting forth efforts to increase our membership, and to encourage participation from our existing valued members (...that's YOU!) I hope you will be supportive when she gets in touch with you. You will learn more about Elizabeth by reading her contribution to this newsletter.

Remembering a Dear CF Member:

I'd like to close my newsletter message with a warm tribute to Mike Pyryt our dear CF member who departed from us in January. He was truly one of us, and a solid support for the Conceptual Foundations Network. Mike helped with many of our larger efforts (presentations, and reviews) and smaller ones (signs and record keeping). I am personally grateful to him for the many years of service he donated to CF. On a larger scale, I am sure we are all mindful of his many contributions to the greater NAGC organization, and are appreciative of his advocacy for gifted children throughout the world. CF dedicates this spring newsletter to Michael Pyryt, for whom life was too short.

Epilogue: News from Bethesda

I have just returned from the Leadership Weekend in Bethesda, and I would like our membership to be aware of certain updates. The CF Programming Committee was informed that we would only have 10 slots in the program for the upcoming fall conference. These numbers are based upon a formula that includes our membership, attendance at our sessions, proposals submitted, and the overall reduction that was imposed on **ALL** of the Networks because of the limitation of available rooms in Tampa. The quick math is that we could only accept 25% of the proposals submitted for a regular slot in the program, and we had to reject or make other arrangements for 75% of the submissions. These arrangements included a wait list, in case other slots became available, and poster sessions; in addition, we are still working on putting together an evening session and a mini-key note.

Under these conditions Cheryl Ackerman and I based the final program choices on the blind review ratings, selecting only one proposal from each presenter or group, varying the topics, considering previous presenter history, encouraging new presenters, and looking at the broader picture of what CF was offering. It was difficult to make these decisions, and we hope everyone submitting proposals and our members will trust that we spent dozens of hours trying to do what was best for the CF Network, its members, and the conference attendees. Please consider this when you receive your proposal responses from NAGC. I will be happy to answer any additional questions as they arise.

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My Friend Michael Pyryt: A gentleman and a scholar

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University of Calgary

Michael passed away suddenly January 15, 2008. As I write this, almost six weeks later, I am still filled with disbelief and sadness, feelings that I know many colleagues across the world share. What makes it particularly difficult for me is that our close collaboration evolved into a great personal relationship. We received comments from colleagues here at the University of Calgary and those at a distance, that Michael and I had an enviable collaborative relationship. However, the bond between us went deeper than that—Michael and I were like brothers; brothers who interacted almost daily and who got along very well! It has been an extremely difficult time for me.

Michael's significant contribution to our field is a matter of public record, so instead of dwelling on that, I will discuss some personal observations. Michael had two goals with respect to his work in our field. Because of his strong background and interest in quantitative research design and methodology, Michael aimed to improve the state of research in the field. He did this in various ways: by the quality of his own research, critiquing existing research and by offering guidance to novice and experienced researchers alike. He had the ability to communicate effectively with everyone, from the most stats-phobic Masters student to established researchers. His second goal was to make a contribution to the social and emotional domains of giftedness. He did this by the choice of topics that formed a great deal of his scholarship. I shared his interest in this domain of giftedness; and, this led to our working closely together.

Our collaboration began after Michael joined the Centre for Gifted Education in 1989.



Michael Pyryt

The Centre at the University of Calgary was established in 1988 and we were looking for someone to fill the “Coordinator of Research” position. After a protracted search, Michael was the successful applicant. As I got to know Michael in those early days, it was obvious that we had rescued him from a very demanding and not very satisfying position in West Virginia. As I soon learned, gifted education was his passion and he was very frustrated with his former faculty position which focused on special education. Around ten years after his arrival, when the position of Director of the Centre became open, I was very happy to support his application. It seemed to me that Michael, since 1989, was living a dream—he would have preferred that the dream was in a better climate, however, it was a dream nonetheless. Michael tended to be on the shy side, except when it came to the area of giftedness. When anything to do with our field came up, he became a passionate extrovert, willing to share his knowledge and wisdom with anyone showing an interest.

Going to NAGC with Michael was a great experience. Unlike Michael, I had no academic background in giftedness and therefore was not personally acquainted with scholars in the field. In the early days, I was amazed not only at how many colleagues Michael knew, but how the people all seemed to love him. One of

the things I will miss most is sharing NAGC with Michael. Several years ago we began to share a hotel room and not only did Michael and I go to the various receptions; we had regular receptions of our own in the evenings. We shared many good times with friends who made their way to our room.

During the years that I knew him and especially after sharing hotel rooms, I learned what a sports fanatic Michael was. Unlike most Canadian men, I am not even interested in hockey so it was a source of amazement to me to hear Michael talk at length about his beloved Notre Dame or some team from Kansas (some of his American friends, I am sure would know all of his favorite teams). When we attended CEC or AERA, he would subject me to something called "March Madness" and after a while I began to like watching college basketball.

Anyone who met and got to know Michael knows that he was a very good person. He was generous to a fault and accepting of people. In all my years of working with him I never heard him criticize anyone. While his impact on gifted education and his colleagues is huge, first and foremost Michael was a kindhearted soul. Michael was a truly both a gentleman and a scholar. ■

Memorial donations may be made
to the

*Dr. Michael C. Pyryt Memorial
Fund - Centre for Gifted Education*

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Discovering Merit in the Invisible, Ghostly Gifted

Don Ambrose, Ph.D.
Rider University

Years ago on a visit to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico I saw an elderly homeless woman on the street. She was carrying a few meager belongings in a sack, her clothes were ragged, and her shoes were pieces of cardboard tied to her feet with strips of twine. A Mexican acquaintance told me "She's been on the streets forever. She really knows how to survive. You wouldn't last a week out there living the way she does. I would last a little longer but not much." This woman was a gifted survivor, navigating unrecognized through squalor in the cruel corners of a highly stratified society. She was an example of the hidden gifted, ghostly brilliance that few see or understand. From our comfortable vantage points, we can only guess at the complex pattern finding, nuanced judgment, interpersonal acumen, and creative problem solving she must have employed to sidestep the considerable, persistent, life-threatening dangers she faced in her precarious existence from day to day. Moreover, we can only speculate about the many other less gifted individuals who expire prematurely in failed attempts to meet the same challenges she repeatedly overcame.

Later, I had the good fortune to meet another; very different ghostly gifted individual including a number of luminaries from several different disciplines. Ghost number two, designated Dr. X here to protect his identity, had developed an erudite, highly complex theory of cognition drawn from a synthesis of interdisciplinary research. After a lengthy discussion with him, I was left with the impression that he was at least as gifted and

intelligent as anyone at the symposium, or anyone anywhere for that matter, yet his work was little known. Its depth and complexity seemed to elevate it above the grasp of the fields in which he navigated. While somewhat resentful of his anonymity, he seemed resigned to the likelihood that he was too far ahead of his peers to be recognized. He found consolation in his work, deriving great intrinsic reward from the enormously challenging and complex exploration he had undertaken.

For years, we have grappled with, and argued about, issues of identification in gifted education, trying to ensure that we select those most in need of special services (e.g., Awaya, 2001; Brody & Mills, 2005; Coleman & Cross, 2005; Gallagher, 2002; Maker, 1996; Mann, 2005; Perleth, Schatz, & Mönks, 2000; Plucker, Callahan, & Tomchin, 1996; Renzulli, 1999; Sarouphim, 1999; Webb, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2007; Zorman, 1997). Some of these arguments are bound up in uncertainty about what merit is and who is meritorious. The Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen (2000) claimed that merit is underdefined; pointing out that liberal-democratic societies tend to confound the face-value merit of persons (e.g., pedigree, congruence with mainstream values) with the merit of their actions. Such confounding encourages us to assume that certain people are meritorious simply because they fit a stereotype, even if they have done little or nothing to earn admiration or accolades. Consequently, those born into high-status families receive more credit and reward than low-status people without necessarily having done much, or even anything, to earn it. The homeless woman in Nuevo Laredo obviously had little face-value merit because she likely had little schooling, and almost certainly had not been selected for a gifted program. Nor had she earned, or gained by nepotism, a lofty position in a corporation or institution. Dr. X also had less face-value merit than one would expect from a designer of highly creative cognitive theory. His relative obscurity in cognitive science and related disciplines ensured that.

Some have found forms of hidden giftedness, such as those who fit differing cultural definitions of high ability (e.g., Peterson, 1999; Sternberg, 2007). But no matter how sensitive our selection processes, we may never find all the hidden ghosts: those whose immense talents are obscured in the most desperate socioeconomic contexts, or those whose abilities will become too lofty for most to perceive.

The former cases may represent large numbers of gifted people who are forced to direct their talents to the miserable work of daily survival in awful, inhuman conditions. According to Davis (2006), more than a billion people find themselves mired in unimaginable desperation, eking out tortuous existences in the slums of third-world cities. These discarded humans must find their way in a shifting, unstable, and intensely cruel globalized economic system driven by the tenets of neoclassical economics, which reward the most selfish, greedy, and materialistic of those born into an insular privileged elite (McMurtry, 2002; Rapley, 2004; Stiglitz, 2003; Wolin, 2004). The most selfish and ruthless among the privileged of the world tend to aggressively grasp the economic control levers of the system. One illustrative manifestation of these conditions is the emergence of vast slum areas and trash mountains--enormous mounds of garbage and toxic effluents where large numbers of children spend their formative years picking through muck, looking for something to eat, sell, or barter (Davis). How many among this billion ghost population are exceptionally bright survivors who are destined to languish in misery, unrecognized?

In addition, the increasing stratification of developed nations in the globalized, 21st-century world is generating third-world conditions within developed nations. This occurs most in nations that value the tenets of neoclassical economics and its accompanying neoconservative ideology with its unregulated, unfettered, free-market economies that allow the most ruthless and egocentric among the

privileged few to exploit the powerless virtually unchecked. The United States represents the most notable of the hyper-neoclassical systems, providing one of the most unequal contexts for child development (Smeeding, Rainwater, & Burtless, 2002). Consequently, we push ever-larger numbers of desperate people into our own segregated slums. Borrowing words from the 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes (Hobbes, 1985), the lives of these invisible, discarded people at home and abroad are indeed poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Many of the survivors among them represent gifted individuals who were selected informally through the most rigorous, authentic gifted screening and selection process imaginable. The desperate life circumstances of so many raise some important questions for those concerned with giftedness. What cognitive capacities do gifted people exercise and develop while striving to survive in such conditions? Do they know they survive because of their remarkable cognitive capacities or talents, or do they assume from their circumstances that they are failures? What lessons can we learn from them about the impressive human capacity for resiliency? These questions require more attention than they currently receive from both academics and policy makers.

In contrast, the cases of lofty, invisible academic giftedness bring other issues to the fore. Some brilliant but unrecognized creators seem not to care, or at least pretend not to care that their works remain obscure and reside beyond the perception of most others. For example, William Blake was a highly creative poet and artist in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. His work went largely unrecognized during his lifetime and has ascended to prominence only in recent decades (Damon, 2006). Now he is considered one of the greatest creators of all time in both fields of endeavor. Some possible reasons for his obscurity during his lifetime are revealed in his own words: "You say that I want somebody to elucidate my Ideas.

But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care." (cited in Fischer, 2004, p. 59). Blake had little use for artists or writers who sought fame and fortune by simplifying their work to appeal to pedestrian thinkers. He thought it an assault on the pursuit of truth. Perhaps there is a lesson here for those of us who encounter recalcitrant gifted young people who march to the beat of different drums while caring little that their work doesn't meet standards others set for them.

Some Implications for Gifted Education

These two forms of hidden, ghostly giftedness require us to expand our own awareness and vision. First, we should focus more attention on the ways in which poverty connects with gifted education. Second, we have to become more open to the unorthodox creators among us, including creative theorists and investigators in the various academic disciplines.

As for finding and nurturing more of the impoverished, ghostly gifted, some have highlighted or explored this issue in our field (e.g., Ambrose, 2002, 2003, 2005; Borland, Schnur, & Wright, 2000; Borland & Wright, 1994, 2000; Cross, 2003; Ford, 1993; Frasier, 1993; Hebert, 2002; Hebert & Beardsley, 2001; Moon & Callahan, 2001; VanTassel-Baska, 1992; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2007) but we need to expand this body of work because the problem is so pervasive. Moreover, most extant work doesn't directly address the most extreme forms of deprivation such as that found on the trash mountains of the third world. The serious erosion of the well-being of the deprived in today's excessively Darwinian, exploitative, globalized neoliberal economy (Woodward & Simms, 2006) makes it likely that more ghostly gifted impoverished young people will face even more severe deprivation and become even more obscure in the near future. Consequently, the urgency of identifying them and supporting the development of their

aspirations and talents is becoming more pronounced.

We also have to work hard to ensure that the gifted young people with whom we work become more sensitive to the possibility that some of their deprived peers who languish in underfunded schools in low-income neighborhoods *are indeed their peers*. According to Shapiro (2003) *empathy gulfs* have been emerging in highly stratified nations because ever-more severe inequalities of wealth and power create “structural incentives for the rich and middle classes to marginalize the poor” (p. 9). Children born into the upper-middle class and above often find themselves in comfortable suburban enclaves geographically separated from impoverished neighborhoods by only a few miles but separated by vast empathy gulfs psychologically. Today’s de facto segregation by class and race allows affluent, gifted children little opportunity for interaction with those less fortunate, and consequently large empathy gulfs make them more likely to fall for stereotypical assumptions that the poor lack character and substance. Lott (2002) called this shunning of the poor *social distancing* arguing that it establishes serious barriers to achievement and robs the poor of equal opportunity. Empathy gulfs can make otherwise intelligent people assume that status differences are facts of nature so they become more likely to engage in social distancing. We can assess the size of our own psychological empathy gulfs by considering our own reactions when we meet homeless people on the street. If we automatically assume that they are feeble-minded, drug-addicted authors of their own fates and consequently are unworthy of attention or assistance, we may be perpetuating the troubling phenomenon of social distance and we may be inclined to pass on these disturbing attitudes to gifted young people.

Considering the possible existence of brilliant but unrecognized creators, we should push for gifted children to be more open to the unorthodox creative work of others so that the future William Blakes of the world will not be buried in obscurity for a century or two before

their fields finally catch up with their vision and embrace them. If we are open minded about this form of ghostly giftedness ourselves, and if we encourage our bright charges to adopt similar dispositions, we may strengthen the chances that they will be able to recognize and highlight the more arcane forms of hidden brilliance when they become academic and sociocultural leaders and gatekeepers as adults. Such open mindedness will require more willingness to defer judgment (deferjudice) as advocated by Parnes (see Parnes & Biondi, 1975) and more nuanced judgment and interpretation as advocated by Resnick (1987). Deferjudice will help critics wait long enough for more complete information to emerge about the merits of an unusual idea. Nuanced judgment will allow them to analyze those merits with more accuracy. If the gifted leaders of tomorrow do become better able to spot the hidden brilliance in unorthodox authors, artists, or scientists, they could accelerate progress in those fields by bringing highly creative new work into juxtaposition with better-known established work. Such connections might generate some highly productive creative association at the future cutting edges of academic fields. The process of creative association produces creative ideas when remotely associated constructs collide (see Koestler, 1964; Mednick, 1962).

Of course, we shouldn’t encourage gifted young people to accept new ideas in the natural sciences, social sciences, or humanities on blind faith. Unorthodox, arcane ideas eventually must go through the processes of peer-reviewed scrutiny. But at the same time, exercising deferjudice and nuanced judgment in efforts to allow more evidence to come in before rendering more accurate critical assessments could allow some future William Blakes to flourish, thereby enriching knowledge bases in various disciplines. Deferring judgment about new ideas is consistent with proposals by the eminent philosopher of science Imre Lakatos (1978) who advocated for a grace period to protect fragile new scientific theory until it had a

chance to grow some roots before being attacked full bore by peer-reviewed criticism.

Making theoretic judgment more nuanced will require the gifted professionals of the future to carefully assess the worthiness of applying expert judgment to creative work. While using the ratings of experts to assess creativity might work well for the less ground-shifting forms of creativity, such as that found at the small-scale levels of Cohen's (1989) continuum of creativity, experts in a field may be ill-positioned to assess the most avant-garde, potentially paradigm shifting ideas because they are the most steeped in the orthodoxies of the day. Just as a fish cannot see the water in which it swims, a prominent expert swimming in the ontological assumptions, the epistemological canons, and the methodological predispositions of his or her field can have great difficulty withholding judgment about cutting-edge new constructs that don't fit the reified frameworks of the field. Consequently, the most creative insights can lie fallow for years, decades, or even centuries, as did the bulk of William Blake's work.

Finally, we should look for other forms of hidden, ghostly giftedness. Another possible variety of obscured giftedness may exist in the form of those who support the development of others from behind the scenes: those whose generosity and other-centered approach to life ensure that they will remain obscured from recognition themselves. Examples may include stay-at-home parents who do wonderfully creative acts to support the aspiration growth and talent development of their children (C. M. Ackerman, personal communication, November 10, 2007). These other-centered supportive forms of ability may be somewhat invisible through the cultural lenses of Westerners but more prominent in other cultures. For example, Peterson (1999) found that Latino subjects emphasized humility and community service when identifying the characteristics of gifted people they have known. Similarly, Alfred's

(1999) description of leadership behaviors in indigenous cultures highlighted the importance of putting others before self, maintaining a modest demeanor, and striving for consensus in decision-making. These propensities differ considerably from the egocentric individualism that often dominates Western leadership behaviors.

Merit and high ability seem to be ill defined, possibly moving targets. Excessive certainty about what behaviors, dispositions, and achievements are meritorious can force us to miss some important dimensions of giftedness, talent, and intelligence. Broader and deeper searches for high ability guided by flexible, nuanced conceptions of merit should strengthen the conceptual foundations of gifted education and related fields.

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In Case You Missed Minneapolis...

Many of our fellow Conceptual Foundations Network members could not be with us in Minneapolis last November 2007 for the National Association for Gifted Children annual conference. Perhaps you are curious about what the Network had to offer. Drs. Wenda Sheard and Alexina Baldwin share discussions and excerpts of the presentations they led as part of the Conceptual Foundations Strand.

~ The Editor

New Strategies for Gifted Advocacy

Wenda Sheard, J.D. Ph.D.

Gifted advocates can benefit from rudimentary knowledge of several theories from the field of political science. In my 2007 NAGC session, *New Strategies for Gifted Advocacy*, I gave participants an overview of Kingdon's (1984) multiple streams theory, Baumgartner and Jones's (2002) punctuated equilibrium theory, and Mancur Olson's (1965) logic about collective action. I also shared humorous, but time-tested nuggets from Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* (1971), which I encountered in an advanced education policy course for superintendents and principals during my Ph.D. coursework.

In his multiple streams theory, Kingdon (1984) identified three streams—the problem stream consisting of problems identified by the public, experts, and/or others; the policy stream consisting of policy solutions proposed primarily by experts; and the politics stream consisting of everyone acting in the political arena trying to change laws and policies. Change happens when the three streams merge together,

when the identified problems meet the proposed solutions in the political arena. Gifted education change happens when identified problems (e.g., children unchanged by curricula; businesses unable to find local talent, etc), meet proposed policy solutions (e.g., increased use of acceleration, improved teacher education, etc.) in the political arena (e.g. local school board meetings, state school board meetings, legislative committees, etc.)

To place gifted problems and solutions on the political radar screen, perhaps gifted advocates need to phrase problems and solutions in terms like accountability, or perhaps gifted advocates need to overcome elitist perceptions that inhibit some politicians from voting in favor of gifted programs. The precise “place it in the politician's faces” strategy depends on the level of politics involved (federal, state, local), depends on other issues facing those politicians, and depends on what voters understand and desire.

According to Baumgartner and Jones's (2002) punctuated equilibrium theory, long periods of no change (equilibrium) happen when negative feedback processes repel outsiders and quell dissent in an effort to keep policy-making hidden in policy monopolies. We do some of this in gifted education; our gifted coordinators and teachers endeavor to keep parents happy, to quell dissent, to keep decision-making about gifted education within our own organizations, at our own conferences, and within our state department of education gifted offices. Power in political monopolies comes through autonomy from the broader political arena. Autonomy is created by the use of jargon and by claims that experts are needed. Within our gifted field we use special language that makes it difficult for outsiders to enter our realm. We claim that gifted experts are needed to make gifted-related decisions.

Baumgartner and Jones (2002) claim that change happens, in other words the equilibrium is punctured, when positive feedback processes build together and reach a tipping point. Positive feedback processes

include whatever might happen to cause people to desire change. Negative feedback processes, by contrast, quell dissent and this maintains equilibrium. When positive feedback processes are happening, public attention might shift from one underlying element of the policy issue to another underlying element of the policy issue. For instance, the public might be concerned about education finance as a property tax issue one day, but the next day the public might be concerned with education finance as a national security issue.

Whether and when change happens depends on how issues are portrayed, what symbols are used, and which institutions have jurisdiction over the issues. Periods of policy punctuation often include changes in intensities of interest, changes in public images associated with the policy, and changes in “institutional jurisdiction”—perhaps a new government department is formed, or a new system of schools is developed, or a new organization is founded. Periods of punctuation might also include emotional public campaigns capable of trumping experts such as policy-analysts, lobbyists, and attorneys. Punctuations in the equilibrium occur when policy image changes and institutional changes combine.

What we do in order to “punctuate” the gifted education “equilibrium” that has existed for so many years? How can we convince legislatures and others that we need big improvements in the ways we educate gifted children? First, we must recognize that mollifications, those negative feedback processes that quell dissent, also make change less likely. Second, we must recognize any positive feedback processes that currently exist, and perhaps give those change-inducing processes a boost by attaching images and emotional appeals to those processes. The Russian launch of Sputnik in 1958 was a tremendous boost for gifted education; our country, filled with emotional images of Russian

superiority, quickly increased the level of science and math education in our schools.

Currently we have an unpopular federal law, No Child Left Behind, which is creating havoc with gifted programming around the country and swaying financially able parents to move their children to private schools. Perhaps we can capture and spread emotional, image-laden stories about the influences of that law on gifted children, and in particular on low income gifted children. Perhaps we can juxtapose those stories with facts from the business world and graduate schools about how they continue to import talent in the sciences, technology, engineering, and math from foreign countries due to a lack of such talent developed in our nation’s schools.

When I first encountered Mancur Olson’s 1965 book *The Logic of Collective Action* during my political science studies, I wished I had read it years before I started organizing gifted parents into advocacy groups. In addition to being an exciting experience for logical minds, the book offers insights into why some advocacy groups grow and others dissolve. Olson’s work on the logic of collective action should be shared with leaders of state and local gifted organization in order to improve the internal dynamics of those organizations.

In a nutshell, Olson taught us that people join a group in order to receive benefits from the group. We join the American Automobile Association for the maps and free towing, not because we agree with its legislative agenda. We join the American Association of Retired Person for the discounts, not because we agree with its legislative agenda. Individuals will join gifted organizations for benefits now, not for legislation later.

As Olson (1965) explained, if we want to attract people to an advocacy group, we must offer benefits that people cannot obtain elsewhere. Some gifted groups offer Saturday programs for children of members. Some offer newsletters or discounts on NAGC membership

fees. Some offer monetary help with attending NAGC or state gifted conferences. Some offer social time with other parents of gifted children. Advocacy groups that grow understand the fact that most people are self-interested.

Saul Alinsky's book *Rules for Radicals* (1971) similarly tells the truth about people. Because people are comforted by the familiar and shocked by the unfamiliar, Alinsky advises advocates to comfort your allies and surprise your opponents. If you wish to build a coalition, don't walk into an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood while eating a ham sandwich. Alinsky teaches us to embrace the duality inherent in all arguments; we understand, anticipate, and respond to counterarguments. We must see the entire picture, not just our small corner.

As gifted advocates, we might take Alinsky's lessons to heart by expanding our worldview from gifted education to education in general to society at large to global concerns. We should anticipate and understand what parents of non-gifted students might say to school board members when we lobby for change on the local level. Some of us are beginning to discuss whether we should change our terminology from the "ham sandwich" term "gifted" to something more palatable to our potential allies.

I encourage gifted advocates to learn more about political science theories that might be used successfully in gifted education advocacy. I also encourage gifted advocates to continue to share policy successes with one another, perhaps within the Conceptual Foundations Network, or perhaps within an as-yet uncreated NAGC network devoted to political and policy issues.

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Looking Back in Order to Look Forward: An Historical Perspective and a Roadmap for the Future

Alexinia Y. Baldwin, Ph.D.
University of Connecticut

The changing ideas of intelligence and its effect on the current thinking about giftedness was discussed in terms of these changes and the theoretical and or philosophical approaches used to make these changes. Education of the gifted as a field has experienced conceptual problems related to how it has been defined and the constructs by which we plan programs and subsequently identify those persons who are to be included in them. Understanding the progression of ideas about intelligence will help us plan the most effective strategies for including the underserved populations in programs for the gifted.

From Darwin, Spearman Thorndike, Thurstone, Burt Jensen, and Kamin, to the present group of theoreticians, Sternberg, Gardner, and Renzulli; ideas about intelligence have changed tremendously. Although the "G" factor theory is still an important aspect of the intelligence discussion, many theories have been advanced that would deny its controlling factor in the definition of intelligence; however, controversies about intelligence repeat themselves. Whereas Dalton, Spearman, and

Jensen worked hard to prove their hypotheses, we must understand that they drew conclusions about the brain and intelligence from research data that also reflected the culture and the mores of that time.

With the Mary Frasier Scholarship Nominees being a vibrant new step for NAGC it is now time during this era to lend fresh ideas and understanding of the rationales that have been used in the identification process of underserved minorities. We should be reviewing the new test protocols for identification and analyzing the effect these instruments have on the identification process; exploring the philosophical and conceptual basis for these recommendations.

Attitudes regarding the potential for these students and the appropriately designed academic experiences they should have are challenges for the future. It is important for us to know how we got to this point in our understanding of giftedness and how we can move forward without repeating the mistakes or misguided theories of the past.

Introduction and Greeting from our CF Membership Chair

The Conceptual Foundations Network is pleased to welcome our new Membership Chair, Elizabeth A. Romey. Elizabeth is Assistant Professor of Gifted Education at the University of South Alabama. She completed her Ph.D. from the University of Connecticut's gifted education program in 2006. Her research interests include psychobiological correlates of giftedness, the socio-emotional nature and needs of gifted students, and depictions of giftedness in fiction and literature. She is also involved with International Future Problem Solving and National History Day as an evaluator and state

board member. In her (purely hypothetical) spare time, she writes science fiction and fantasy, with an emphasis on gifted characters and issues; her first three novels, *Lera of Tymoria: The Dragonmage*, *Dragonmagic*, and *Arkanus*, are available from Royal Fireworks Press.

Message from Dr. Romey

It is a pleasure and an honor to serve as the new Membership Officer for the Conceptual Foundations Network- an honor to serve a division that by its very nature and name serves the core of NAGC's mission, and a pleasure to help in recruiting new members, both those who want to support the existing work in our field and those whose contributions serve to advance it.

As a graduate student I admit to having been intimidated by the very idea of the "Conceptual Foundations" network (then "division")--- isn't that where all the "leaders and thinkers in the field" would be? Surely a lowly graduate assistant couldn't have a voice in such august company! Yet, when, as a professor, I screwed up my courage to participate, I discovered a committed and dedicated group of individuals who are eager to welcome the contributions of newer members and to share their expertise. My hope is that as Membership Officer I can encourage the next generation of leaders and thinkers to take their places in a network that, by its very name, serves to support the *foundation* of NAGC and of the understanding of giftedness.

~ Elizabeth A. Romey, Ph.D.



Reader's Corner: Book Reviews and Books of Interest

This issue's Reader's Corner highlights Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration, edited by Conceptual Foundations Network member Sal Mendaglio, Ph.D. We are please to bring you two pieces about the book. Dr. Mendaglio provides us with insight into his subjective experience working on this book, while Jane Englund provides a review of the book for our members.

~ The Editor

Changing Your Glasses: Looking at Things in a Different Way

Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration
Sal Mendaglio, Ph.D., Editor.
(2008) Great Potential Press.
ISBN-10: 0910707847

A Review by:
Jane Englund, University of Virginia

Those of us not possessing 20/20 vision are familiar with the perspective shift which occurs by the simple act of removing or putting on glasses. Things which appeared one way are suddenly quite different. Even those with perfect vision can attest to the difference a pair of ordinary sunglasses can make in one's worldview. This is akin to what happens to a worldview of personality theory and gifted individuals when one looks through the lens of Polish psychiatrist Kazimierz Dabrowski's ideas.

In his newly published book, *Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration*, Sal Mendaglio has brought us an interesting and useful addition to the literature of both psychology and gifted education. The theory of positive disintegration (TPD) and its most well-known component, "overexcitabilities" (perhaps

more accurately called "supersensitivities") in the five domains of psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal and emotional sensitivities, has been an influential force in gifted education for many years. This theory has been less well known within psychology, specifically personality theory, eclipsed by the better known thinkers Freud, Adler, Maslow, and Rogers. The advent of this book will stimulate additional awareness in both fields.

This book is organized into three sections with a total of thirteen chapters written by authors who have worked with, known, or studied Dabrowski from many perspectives. The first section provides interesting biographical background, a clear delineation of TPD, and applications and underpinnings of the theory. The second section describes the application of positive disintegration to gifted education and the last section explores the theory from the perspective of differing disciplines including philosophy, sociology, and spirituality.

One of the most fascinating elements of Dabrowski's work is the conceptual reframing it requires. Negative emotions are conceived of as harbingers of growth and development as opposed to symptoms to be eliminated. Dabrowski viewed emotions as primary in achieving personality development, occupying a central role, with intelligence relegated to a secondary position of influence, insufficient for complete human development. "Personality," in Dabrowski's view, is not a fixed universal attribute, rather something to be created by the individual. Positive disintegration (the process by which personality is achieved) requires two consecutive processes: first, disintegration of a primitive mental organization aimed at fulfilling biological needs and mindlessly complying with social norms, and second, a reintegration of mental organization at a higher level of functioning in which the individual transcends biological determinism and becomes autonomous. In order to achieve this level of personality development, he felt that developmental potential or a constitutional

endowment including “supersensitivities / overexcitabilities” or a high level of reactivity in the central nervous system, as well as the presence of creative “dynamisms” or autonomous inner forces must be present. The existence of intensities and sensitivities has been widely accepted within the field of gifted education as characteristic of gifted children and adults (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984; Webb, 2005). Heightened response levels to varying kinds of stimuli have led some individuals to a sense of being too different or flawed (Aron, 1996).

In Dabrowski’s view, it is just these dynamisms (astonishment with self, disquietude with self, feelings of inferiority toward oneself, feelings of shame and guilt, dissatisfaction with oneself), what he called “positive maladjustment,” that lead directly to empathy and identification with others and an ultimate movement towards achieving a higher level of personality development.

Dabrowski (1902 – 1980) experienced and survived both world wars while living in Poland. One of four siblings, he lost a three-year-old sister to meningitis, his younger brother was killed during WWII, and his older brother was imprisoned in a German concentration camp. He himself was imprisoned because of his connection with the Polish underground and his first wife died of tuberculosis in 1940. He was certainly no stranger to the experience of negative emotion.

These experiences and observations, which perhaps seeded his theories, were followed by many years of clinical work at the Universities of Lublin, Warsaw, Geneva, Vienna, Paris, and Harvard. He received his medical degree from the University of Geneva, eventually focusing on child psychiatry.

In addition to the process of *positive* disintegration, Dabrowski also noted that *negative* and *partial* disintegration could occur. A negative disintegration process referred to an incomplete process in which an individual

experienced only the dissolution of mental organization without subsequent reconstruction and might be described as chronic psychotic illness. Partial disintegration was a less dramatic process with an individual returning to a lower level of mental organization or limited reintegration.

Dabrowski viewed individuals undergoing positive disintegration as being at risk in the world. “Dabrowski’s life mission was to save and protect those who are tuned to the pain of the world and its dangerous trends, but whose voice is not heeded. He saw that those who were open to higher realities were often poorly adapted to this world and thus at risk for not succeeding or even surviving.” (Piechowski, 2006, p.18), “By pathologizing disintegrative experiences associated with creativity and self-transformation, we stigmatize individuals undergoing accelerated growth and add to their burdens rather than help relieve them.” (Mendaglio, 2008, p.153).

Within TPD, conflict is a hallmark of the growth process. The two forces of biology and environment interact with the third force of autonomous inner dynamisms to stimulate personality development. Mendaglio points out that Dabrowski viewed this conflict as rooted in an individual’s values, not as a product of frustration of needs. The prescriptions of the social environment are to be transcended, not complied with; ideals are to be lived, not attenuated; neurotic symptoms are not to be remedied, but celebrated as a harbinger of growth; and traits are not static, rather dynamic.

This excellent and informative compilation of writing on Dabrowski is sure to illuminate, irritate, educate, stimulate, and at the very least, foster further dialogue and interaction among interested parties within both psychology and gifted education. A fuller understanding of Dabrowski’s work will be gained by readers of this edition and an interesting view through unique lenses will be experienced as well.

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Reflections on Editing *Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration*

Sal Mendaglio, Ph.D.
University of Calgary

After completing the book, I wondered whether the work of all involved was guided by some unearthly force. Although I began planning the book in 2004, the actual work began only in January 2007. The book was available for NAGC, November 2007! The more I thought about the timeline, the more astounded I felt. Of course, I was blessed with a group of people who shared a passion for the theory of positive disintegration. My authors and publisher were all highly motivated to complete this project. That is not to say that there weren't some challenges along the way. High levels of overexcitabilities and positive maladjustment are bound to create tensions, as Kazimierz taught us.

I believe that tensions fueled contributors' creative instincts.

I had two goals in mind for the book: to bring together the perspectives of key people steeped in the theory and to convey the full scope of the theory. To accomplish the first goal, I invited contributors that are associated with the theory in our field: Michael Piechowski, Linda Silverman, Frank Falk, Nancy Miller, Michael Pyryt, and Elizabeth Mika. I also invited people who were directly or indirectly familiar with Dabrowski himself: Bill Tillier, Marlene Rankel, and Dexter Amend; all of whom worked closely with Kazimierz during his tenure at the University of Alberta. Laurence Nixon came to know of Dabrowski while Laurence worked with Dabrowski's close collaborator, Andrew Kawczak, a now retired philosophy professor in Montreal. In addition to writing unique chapters for our book, the contributors who knew Dabrowski, including Michael Piechowski, added personal anecdotes in their chapters. I must say that those glimpses into Dabrowski the man are my favorite part of the book.

In my contribution, I presented the theory for what it is: Dabrowski's theory of personality. In my two chapters, my goal was to present a rendition of the theory that is faithful to his works available in English. I also wanted to present it in a way that is accessible to psychologists and others outside of our field. One way that I attempted to do this is by comparing the theory of positive disintegration to other approaches to personality, namely, psychoanalysis, self theory and the Big Five.

Looking back on the entire process, I'd like to believe that the unearthly force guiding the project was Kazimierz's spirit. I know for certain, though, that there was a powerful earthly force that was intimately involved in guiding the project from beginning to end: Jim Webb, publisher, and his staff.



Letter from Nancy Green, NAGC Executive Director

The following is a reprint of a letter sent to Network Leadership describing the network election process and new Policy Statement. We have also included an organizational chart of the NAGC National Office leadership. As it is of interest to the entire network, we share it with you here.
~ The Editor

Greetings Network/Division Leaders,

Now that we're moving to an open, unified national process for network leadership elections this year, I wanted to be sure you were aware of exactly how everything will work. You also have an opportunity to invite new leaders to step up to these very important roles in the leadership structure--it's time to spread the word! It is especially important that we communicate during this time frame so that we're clear on a process, and the national office has an opportunity to assist as much as possible. Here are specifics:

1) First, about the timeline:

Network Nominations will be accepted from February 15 until April 7, 2008 when the process closes. All Elections will be held via electronic voting from June 1 to June 30th, and newly elected candidates take office on September 1st. Only current network members may vote for their respective network leaders.

2) Second, about the positions: For the first time this year, every Network will hold a contested election for the position of chair-elect, via the national NAGC elections process. The chair-elect serves a one or a two-year term (depending on whether your current chair has already served for two years). Even if your network selected a chair-elect in November, you will still need a candidate to step into the role of chair-elect this September. During this year of transition, we may need to make a few exceptions to get on track. That's why the

Leadership and Elections committees will need to know each network's situation.

3) Third, about the nominations process: In addition to current network leadership, the Leadership Development Committee may also recommend qualified candidates to run for the chair-elect position. Each network is expected to send out notice of these open elections and to identify candidates for leadership positions. Any individual who meets the qualifications to run for Network chair elect may apply by accessing the information on NAGC's website at www.nagc.org. All candidates must complete the requested information in order to be eligible.

4) Fourth, about other leadership roles: If your network chooses to have other leadership roles such as program chair and newsletter chair, you may elect them through your own network process, which would typically occur at your annual business meeting in November. While we didn't discuss holding national elections for other positions, this is something we may want to consider for the future. If you would like to make this happen THIS year, then let us know.

5) Fifth, criteria for candidates: At our meeting in November, we voted on the final criteria required for each nominated candidate. In addition to basic qualifications, all leaders must have served for 3 years as a member of the division/network they hope to chair.

This should cover it, but let me know whether you have other specific issues or circumstances that may not be covered by the memo above, and by the final version of the policy we approved in November. (see attached)

Incidentally, the network policies we approved will go before the NAGC Board for a vote at our March meeting. Questions? Please do let me know.

Many thanks, Nancy

6.1.c (2)
**NAGC
BOARD
POLICY**
Last Modified: 01/31/08

POLICY TITLE:	Networks Elections	
RESPONSIBILITY OF:		APPROVED ON: 00/00/00
PREPARED BY:	Mary Slade, Carol Tieso Paula O-K, Kevin Kendall	NEXT REVIEW: 00/00/00
POLICY AREA:	Article X, Section 0, 0.0	

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This policy describes the process and guidelines for Network Elections, the qualifications for candidacy, as well as the rights and responsibilities of service for officers within a specified Network.

II. POLICY STATEMENT

In accordance with NAGC nominations and elections procedures, all NAGC voting members in good standing are invited to submit their applications for candidacy for a Network Officer as long as all position qualifications are satisfied. The NAGC Elections Committee along with the NAGC Office will conduct all Network officer elections in conjunction with all other association elections.

Terms and Positions

Tenure of Office for successful candidates for any Network officer is two years. A term of office begins on September 1st of the year elected. No Network officer can serve in any office more than one two-year term. However, a Network chair may serve in the role up to 4 years total during a 10 year period. Furthermore, Network chairs can serve in this capacity in up to three networks during a 10-year period.

Network officer positions must include the Chair and Chair-Elect. Networks may include other officer positions, e.g. secretary, newsletter editor, program chair, as desired and needed. The Chair-Elect automatically rolls into the Chair position.

IV. Development of the Slate

Applications must include required information (name, home address, phone, and e-mail address), current occupation, education, career highlights and history, NAGC participation, significant leadership activities, significant presentations, publications and/or creative contributions, and a statement of candidacy (150 words maximum).

Candidates for Network office shall be nominated by the membership of that Network or by the Leadership Committee. Nominees will then be contacted, vetted, and invited to run for office in the next election by the Leadership Development Committee.

The nominations process will then follow the approved policies and procedures for all nominations for candidates for NAGC elected positions. (see Elections Policy and Procedures.)

Candidates' activity is restricted from any promotion or endorsement in NAGC Network communications.

Timelines for application submission are set by the National Office and must be observed without exception

Elections Procedures: The approved ballot will be sent to ALL eligible voting members of the association, by mail or electronically. The election will be open for at least 30 days. Only Network members may vote for their respective leadership positions.

V. QUALIFICATIONS

The following qualifications must be met by successful candidates and are evaluated by the NAGC Elections Committee in approving a slate of officers.

Successful candidates must:

- Be an NAGC member in good standing.
- Be a member of the specified Network for at least three years.
- Demonstrate experience as a strong facilitator, communicator, and consensus builder.
- Possess documented experience, service, or scholarship in gifted education

VI. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

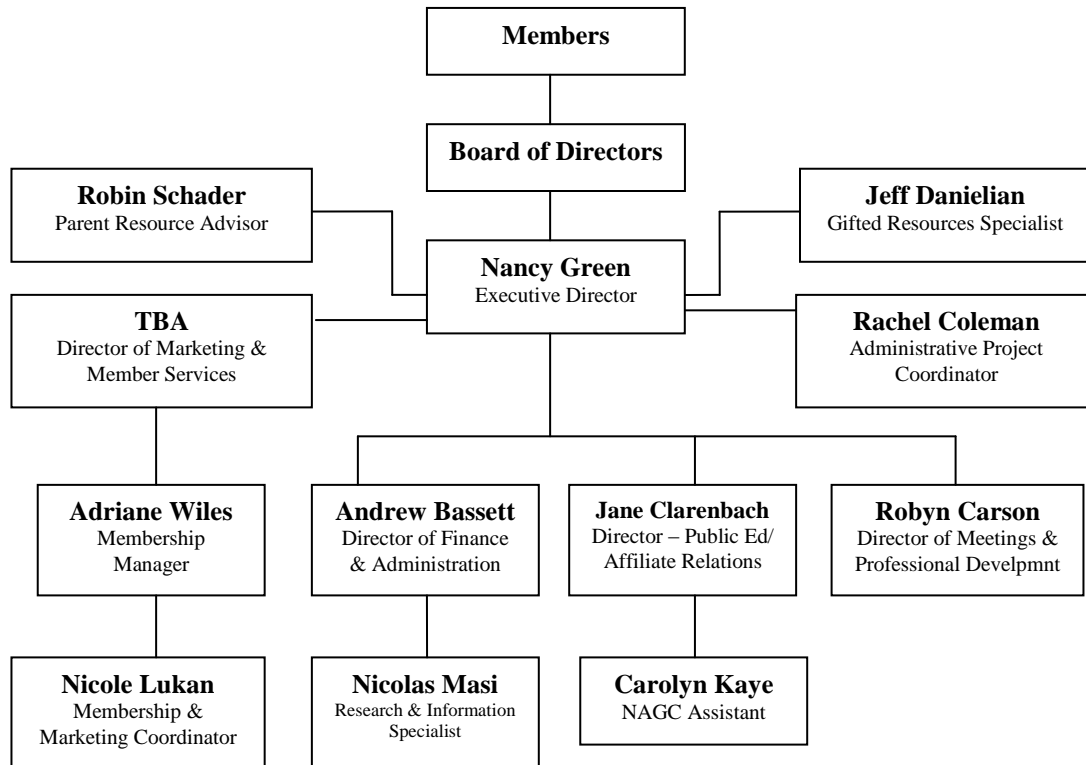
Rights

- All Network chairs will receive complimentary conference registration during their terms of office.
- NAGC will cover convention expenses up to \$500 upon presentation of original receipts for travel and hotel for chairs whose networks have satisfied annual reporting requirements.
- Networks with adequate finances may reimburse officers for one night of hotel expense in order to arrive early for Network pre-conference activities.
- Expenses for one hotel room night for the March leadership meeting will be reimbursement by NAGC. Other meeting costs related to the March retreat will be covered by the network.
- Network chairs will receive a list of current member emails from the national office on a monthly basis

Responsibilities

- Network chairs must submit annual plans and reports of activity in accordance with the NAGC Board Reporting calendar.
- Network chairs are expected to attend up to two (2) NAGC Network meetings per year; one at the annual convention each November, and the other usually scheduled in conjunction with the affiliate conference in March.
- In cooperation with the National Office, Network officers shall provide, or work with program chair to provide, oversight or support of the convention proposal submission and selection process within their respective topic area
- Network officers shall participate in Network training as established by the Network Communications Committee
- Network officers will work in partnership with the National Office regarding how to manage Network finances, recruit members, and election of officers.

NAGC NATIONAL OFFICE 2008



Jeff Danielian
jdanielian@nagc.org
Disseminate teacher content/ THP 40%
Update website content 30%
Coordinate Educational Material 30%

Robyn Carson
rcarson@nagc.org
Regional Academies 28%
Convention Presentation 25%
Convention Program/Brochure 30%
Exhibit Hall/ Exhibit Booth 2%
Network Liaison 10%

Robin Schader
parentspecialist@nagc.org
Conducts Research
Develops information for parents,
responds to their questions, Writes
articles/resource sheets

Rachel Coleman
rcoleman@nagc.org
Committees and Task Forces
Assist Exec Director
Board Speakers Program
NAGC Awards
Publication Reprint Requests
Contest & Award Application Request

Jane Clarenbach
hane@nagc.org
Committees and Pubs 50%
Affiliates and Advocacy 10%
Legislative Issues 10%
Other Associations 5%
Parenting for High Potential/U.S. Dept
of Education Issues 5%
NCATE 10%

Andrew Bassett
abassett@nagc.org
Accounting 25%
Audits/Taxes 15%
Budget Issues 15%
Financial standings 10%
Insurance 5%
Human Resources 5%
Purchasing and Printing 10%
Administration 15%

Nicolas Masi
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Web content managements 10%
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