CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

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

Volume 14 Number 1 Spring 2006

TRIDIRECTIONAL EXPLORATIONS

This issue includes interesting explorations in three different directions with new concepts to ponder.

In the first article Peta Hay explores the advanced moral reasoning of gifted children and discusses whether it might result from a higher level of cognition or from other factors such as advanced empathy. She offers a visual model of characteristics which factor into advanced moral reasoning.

Next Don Ambrose introduces us to the broad range of cognitive disciplines which can give us insight into the conceptual foundations of giftedness. He reminds us of the interconnectedness of all things, and challenges us to gather useful concepts wherever we can find them to share with gifted educators.

In our third article, Bob Schultz waxes mythopoetic in his search for the inner soul of giftedness, reminding us to study programs and processes only in the service of individual people.

Finally Don Ambrose presents a call for papers from graduate students to compete for our Conceptual Foundations Division yearly award. There are some nice prizes and recognition along with publication of the paper. See page 13 for details on how to enter.

We hope you enjoy this thought-provoking issue!

Margaret Leigh, Editor

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A Model for Prosocial Moral Reasoning in Gifted Children

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I am fascinated by gifted children's moral development. When I first studied the social and emotional development of gifted children, I was intrigued to learn that gifted children tend to use higher levels of moral reasoning than their age peers. For example, Howard-Hamilton (1994) studied 99 gifted students involved in a residential gifted program and 68 regular students then tested them using Rest's *Defining Issues Test* (1986). She found that gifted adolescents, when compared to Rest's test norms, reasoned at a college student or adult level. Many other studies confirm these results, but why do gifted children have higher levels of moral reasoning than their age peers? Is it simply their advanced intellect?

Cognitive Trends

Research tends to emphasize the cognitive connection between gifted children and moral reasoning. Derryberry, Barger, Snyder & Wilson (2004) found that gifted children's depth and speed of processing relates to their advanced moral reasoning. Arbuthnot (1973) also found a relationship between cognitive-intellectual functioning and mature moral reasoning. He found that there were small to moderate correlations between maturity in moral judgment and measures which reflected abstraction and analytical skills. Researchers have not tended to suggest characteristics other than high cognitive ability that could contribute to gifted children's' high moral reasoning. However, high

level cognition alone may not fully explain the high levels of moral reasoning in gifted children. Could other characteristics in gifted children also contribute to their high levels of moral reasoning?

Empathy as a Possible Contributor to Moral Reasoning

Some theorists argue that there are possible connections between empathy and moral reasoning. Hoffman (2000) criticized cognitive-developmentalists due to their exaggerated emphasis on "rational, cognitive processes" (p. 131). He argued that cognitive-developmental theory does not explain why children who imagine what another person thinks and feels may put this person's needs before their own instead of simply using the information about others for manipulation and abuse. A fuller understanding of moral reasoning is possible when empathy is taken into account. But what is empathy? Empathy seems to mean different things to different people.

Hoffman (1984) and Davis (1983) separated empathy into two parts in order to make sense of the plethora of definitions: cognitive empathy and affective empathy. According to Hoffman (1984), *cognitive empathy* is "the cognitive awareness of another person's internal states" (thoughts, feelings, perceptions, intentions), and *affective empathy* is "the vicarious affective response to another person" (p. 103). Affective empathy may involve feeling what one imagines the other is feeling and may also involve 'sympathy' or feeling sorry about another person's experience of sadness or distress. Cognitive and affective empathy do not involve any behavior, although empathic behavior may result from empathy. For example, Maria may see that her friend is crying. She may imagine that her friend is feeling upset and may even feel upset herself when she looks at her friend. This is empathy. She may then hug and comfort her friend and this is empathic behavior. So do gifted children have high levels of empathy?

Gifted Children and Empathy

Researchers have argued that gifted children demonstrate high levels of empathy. However, this research is often based on behavior. For example, Piechowski (2003) cited many examples of active young people attempting to relieve the sufferings of others through such things as raising money for the deaf or blind, sending books to Africa and collecting food for hungry people. Silverman (1994) wrote of a 2 ½ year old girl who asked her mother to send all her money to the victims of an earthquake in Russia. Lovecky (1997) wrote of a 6-year old boy who befriended a developmentally disabled 12-year old after noticing that other children were teasing him. While empathic behavior may indicate the existence of empathy, research that focuses on gifted children's empathy itself may be more useful to understanding whether gifted children use empathy in their moral reasoning. Other research examined the capacity to understand others' feelings. Salzman (1989) investigated what she called the 'interpersonal reasoning' of 46 intellectually talented and 46 typical third graders. Typical children could recognize the feelings of the protagonists in the dilemmas, but were unable to understand that a person may feel conflicting emotions at one time. Intellectually talented children, however, were better able to recognize feelings in others and to understand mixed thoughts, emotions, and motives. Salzman (1989) concluded, "maturity of intellect appears to be accompanied by advanced understanding of [and] sensitivity to the feelings of others" (p. 19). This research and others similar, tend to suggest that gifted children have abilities to understand others' feelings and perspectives. However, while large-scale studies are needed to provide more extensive empirical evidence of gifted children's high levels of empathy, the research seems promising.

Moral Reasoning and Empathy: Prosocial Reasoning

Nancy Eisenberg (1976) researched the existence of a type of moral reasoning that incorporates empathy. Her theory of prosocial moral reasoning explored situations in which a person's needs and desires conflict with another person's needs and desires (Eisenberg, Miller, Shell, McNalley, & Shea, 1991). Her theory suggested that empathy stimulates the development of moral principles and moral cognitions that reflect concern for others. A person may be able to imagine what another feels or thinks in a particular situation

(cognitive empathy) and this may then assist with deciding whether helping would be right (prosocial reasoning). For example, Susan sees that Alena hurt her knee while they are in a race. She looks at Alena and imagines that Alena is thinking, "My knee really hurts" and that Alena is feeling very upset. Susan's empathy may stimulate her prosocial reasoning and she may think it is 'right' for her to help Alena even though she cannot win the race herself if she does so.

Very few studies have explored the prosocial reasoning of gifted children. Blumenthal (1987) examined the prosocial reasoning of gifted elementary students and compared them to regular elementary students. The gifted students made a greater proportion of higher-level prosocial responses than did the regular students. These results need to be verified with empirical research but prosocial moral reasoning theory seems to merit being used to explore whether empathy as well as advanced cognition, may help to give gifted children higher levels of moral reasoning than their age peers.

The Prosocial Reasoning of Gifted Children Model

Figure 1 is an attempt to relate possible contributions to gifted children's moral reasoning. Linda Silverman (1993) argued that gifted children have intellective characteristics that are linked to personality characteristics. She suggested that early moral concern and empathy are linked. In the *Prosocial Reasoning of Gifted Children Model* (Figure 1) introduced in this article, I have borrowed from her *Developmental Model for Counseling the Gifted* to include these two gifted traits. I have included cognition in the model based not only on the research suggesting gifted children have higher levels of moral reasoning, but also based on Kohlberg's (1976) argument that "since moral reasoning clearly is reasoning, advanced moral reasoning depends upon advanced logical reasoning"(1976, p. 32). It is important not to minimize the significant contribution of cognition to moral reasoning.

Eisenberg's (Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo, & Knight, 1991) and Hoffman's (1984) assertion that moral reasoning involves empathy, justifies the inclusion of empathy in the model. Both cognitive and

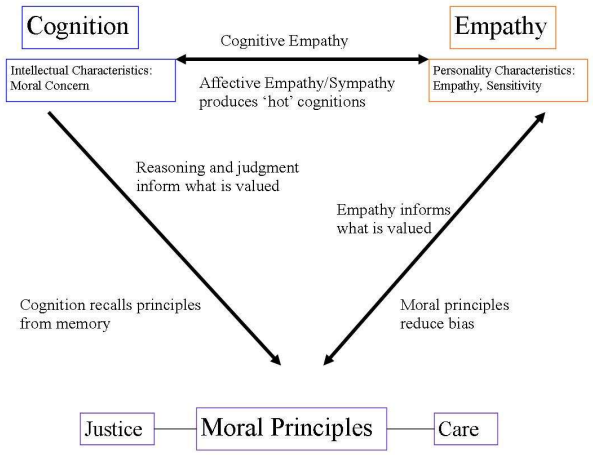

Figure 1: The Prosocial Reasoning of Gifted Children Model

affective aspects of empathy are essential for a fuller understanding of the way in which people empathize. Therefore, both aspects of empathy are included in the model.

Moral principles are included in the model based on Kohlberg's (1976) and Gilligan's (1977) ideas about different moral principle frameworks. Gilligan advocated that care is an important moral principle which is an alternative to Kohlberg's justice principle. According to Hoffman (1987; 2000), both principles are influenced by empathy. He noted the obvious connection between Gilligan's care-moral-reasoning and empathy: Both are focused on considering the welfare of others. However, he also proposed a connection between Kohlberg's justice-moral-reasoning and empathy. He demonstrated this connection through an example: For empathic people, the welfare of others may be important when considering society's resources and consequently, they will be inclined to adhere to distributive justice. Therefore, the *Prosocial Reasoning of Gifted Children Model* includes both care and justice principles.

Hoffman (2000) further argued that both empathy and moral principles operate in moral judgment. "Empathy and caring principles are thus independent, mutually supportive, hence congruent dispositions to help others." (2000, p. 225) Empathy then, helps to select principles that support care for others. Moreover, empathy's contribution to cognitions is to "transform them into *prosocial hot cognitions* – cognitive representations charged with empathic affect, thus giving them motive force." (p. 239). While information can be learned in a clinical, unaffected environment, empathy may provide the "motive to rectify violations to others" (p. 229), thereby shifting information from 'cold' information to 'hot' cognition.

Cognition may also influence empathy. It not only enables the recollection of moral principles, but also plays an important role in reducing bias invoked by empathy (Hoffman, 2000). A situation may be particularly evocative, but cognition allows a more reasoned decision to be made. For example Ulas sees one of his friends picking on a small boy. Ulas' cognition may bring to mind a prosocial principle like 'protecting the helpless'. However, he may empathize with his friend because the small boy is very annoying. Nevertheless, his moral principle may allow him to control his empathy for his friend and understand that the other boy may be frightened. Consequently, Ulas may intervene on the boy's behalf, even though his friend may turn against him.

Cognition, empathy and moral principles work together within the prosocial reasoning framework to finally determine the prosocial decision. For example, Lee brings extra cookies for lunch to share with his friends. He sees that Kayla, who is not his friend, has no lunch. His cognition may bring to mind a principle such as 'equality of distribution' (Justice). His empathy, cognition and past experience have already created this principle. His empathy for Kayla may allow him to understand that she may be feeling hungry and that she may be wishing she had something to eat (cognitive empathy). He may see that she is sad and actually feel sad himself (affective empathy). He may even feel sorry for her (affective empathy/ sympathy). His empathy may create a 'hot cognition' that gives him motivation to act. Even though he knows that his friends would really like the cookies, he thinks that it is right to give them to Kayla (moral principle reducing bias). The fact that Lee is gifted, may contribute additional characteristics that help to understand why Lee is likely to reason prosocially (moral concern and empathy/sensitivity).

While moral reasoning is an important aspect of moral development it is not the same as moral behavior. Moral reasoning is the framework used to judge what the correct behavior may be in a situation. Moral behavior is the consequent 'good' action arising from moral judgment. Eisenberg (1982) reports moderately positive relationships between prosocial reasoning and prosocial behavior. However, it is quite possible that after Lee reasons at a very high prosocial level, he may still choose to give his cookies to his friends. Gifted children may reason at a high level and choose in the end to act in a way that advances selfish desires. Kohlberg (1976) noted that individuals may not function at the moral stage of which they are capable.

The *Prosocial Reasoning of Gifted Children Model* proposed here may help us to understand the ways in which gifted children think in prosocial dilemmas and may furthermore suggest how we can nurture gifted children's empathy to encourage them to use high levels of prosocial reasoning. Even more importantly, the model has the potential to explain how empathy may also increase the likelihood of prosocial behavior. If we can engender prosocial behavior in highly intellectual children, they may become leaders of social change, alleviating problems in our communities in ways we have not yet imagined.

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Far-Reaching Interdisciplinary Explorations for Expansion of Conceptual Foundations

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Understanding high-powered minds requires insights from a wide array of sources. As in the old

Sufi parable about the blind men and the elephant, we can't understand the elephant of high ability by exploring only a few of its parts in isolation. Moreover, even if we do manage to analyze all the parts and put them together into coherent patterns, we still must understand the complex, multidimensional context in which the elephant lives. The only way to grasp the essence of the entire elephant is to synthesize insights from all relevant investigators of its structure, functions, and contexts, and this requires extensive interdisciplinary exploration.

Investigators in the field of gifted education have been promoting broad-scope interdisciplinary work to extend and enrich our understandings of giftedness and talent (e.g., Cohen & Ambrose, 1993; Cohen, Ambrose, & Powell, 2000; Ambrose, 1998, 2003b, 2005b; Dai, 2005; Hong, 1999). Scholars in other fields also have been promoting the importance of broad-scope interdisciplinary investigation. Many of the projects they advance can enrich theory development and research into the nature of high ability and its contextual influences. Some argue that interdisciplinary exploration and syntheses are important for understanding (a) the dynamics of creativity (e.g., Gardner, 1988; Lindauer, 1998; Thiessen, 1998), (b) the sociocultural contexts for human behavior, (e.g., Geertz, 2000), (c) the nature and nuances of consciousness (e.g., Hameroff, Kaszniak, & Scott, 1996), (d) the various dynamics of human action (e.g., Martin, 2003), and (e) the behavior of complex, adaptive systems (e.g., Axelrod, 1997; Nicolescu, 1996, 2002).

In order to ensure that we have encompassed sufficient conceptual territory, an interdisciplinary search must be exceptionally broad, at least in its initial phases. Only after a very broad search can we be reasonably certain that we have not missed some crucial insights about giftedness and talent. For example, if we neglect to include insights from cultural anthropology and indigenous studies, we may unwittingly overgeneralize Western-European culturally ingrained attributes to the gifted. Alfred (1999) provided a useful insight in his portrayal of the leadership behaviors that tend to emerge in many indigenous cultures. Strong leaders, according to this indigenous perspective, do the following:

1. Strive for communication, inclusion, and consensus in decision-making.
2. Develop skin seven spans thick so they can withstand and embrace criticism, thereby maintaining a strong, open mind for decision-making.
3. Show generosity, using their own personal resources to help the group achieve its goals.
4. Think of others before thinking of themselves.
5. Maintain a levelheaded demeanor with all people.
6. Express modesty and humor to minimize personality conflicts.
7. Serve as role models by assuming responsibility and setting good examples. When a decision entails significant, unavoidable hazard, they personally accept the risk rather than asking others to shoulder the negative consequences of a leader's actions.
8. Value the educative, empowering role of government for teaching children in the community.

These behaviors diverge considerably from the vainglorious, self-aggrandizement and selfish, insatiable personal enrichment that characterizes the behavior of many gifted and talented corporate leaders in today's globalized economy.

Alfred's leadership insight is one of many ideas I've imported from outside disciplines in an attempt to stretch our thinking in gifted education. A current project (Ambrose, in press-a) represents the results of a decade-long journey through distant disciplinary terrain, which entails the importation of over 80 theoretic and research insights from the following academic disciplines, among others: Archaeology, Cognitive Science, Complexity Theory, Creative Studies, Cultural Anthropology, Ecology, Economics, English Literature, Environmental Science, Evolutionary Biology, Feminist Theory, History, Indigenous Studies, Journalism, Law, Linguistics, Management, Neuroscience, Organizational Behavior, Philosophy, the History and Philosophy of Science, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, The Arts, Theology, and Theoretical Physics. Here are some very brief summaries of other

insights from this collection, with the source disciplines in parentheses:

1. *Postmaterialist values and worldwide cultural transitions:* (Political Science), Analyses of results from the "World Values Surveys," which portray long-term, large-scale shifts from materialist to postmaterialist values in developed nations (see Inglehart, 1997, 2000), suggest that gifted individuals likely will demonstrate significant future shifts in aspiration development and capacity growth away from frenetic, acquisitive materialism toward creative expression and quality of life concerns (e.g., aesthetic appreciation, community building, environmental stewardship).

2. *Fractured-porous and unified-insular academic disciplines* (History, English Studies, Cultural Anthropology, Economics, Analytic Philosophy): Analyses of academic disciplines show that some are pluralized, have porous borders, tend to be inclusive of diverse ideas, are contested, and are in the process of re-conceiving their fundamental conceptual frameworks (Bender & Schorske, 1997). In contrast, other disciplines are unified, firmly bounded, well policed, and reflect confidence in their conceptual foundations. The fields of gifted education, general education, and creative studies will benefit from similar analyses of their structures and dynamics. A forthcoming November, 2006 NAGC presentation by Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Laurence Coleman, Tracy Cross, and me will analyze the field of gifted education through these lenses.
3. *The end of whose history?* (History): The fall of communism and the dominance of liberal democracies based on capitalist socioeconomic systems prompted claims that humanity had reached the apex of evolution culminating in the end of history (e.g., Fukuyama, 1992). Others argued that such conclusions are shortsighted and further, large-scale socioeconomic and cultural changes are inevitable (see Scott, 2001). The results of this argument may have profound effects on the realization of talent, the manifestation of individual creativity, and the purposes of education in our society.
4. *A few winners taking it all* (Economics): The athletics and entertainment industries traditionally have allocated enormous fame and fortune to their top few star performers while leaving the many near winners to fight for leftover scraps (Frank & Cook, 1995). Recently, the trend has spread to other professions because new technologies are broadly distributing the influence of the stars among the masses, thereby crowding out the work of the many near winners. Interestingly, the "losers" in these industries are very talented, just slightly less able than the stars, and some are more talented than the winners but lacking in good fortune. Piling up gifted and talented young people in a few winner-take-all professions frustrates the highly talented but unfortunate losers (i.e., near winners), while hurting society by denying their talents to other fields.

While this project represents one interdisciplinary exploration, we need others to truly expand the foundations of the field. If you have been reading around the field, making forays into foreign disciplinary territory, you can contribute to this expansion. One outlet for such work is the modified book review series the conceptual foundation established with the Gifted Child Quarterly (For examples of these reviews see Ambrose, 2003a, 2005a, in press-b). Please consider contributing to this or other interdisciplinary projects.

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Beyond Sight of *Shore*, et al. (1991): A Postmodern Visit to Gifted Education

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A review of the literature in the field of gifted child education provides a sense of awe. Broad longitudinal explorations surface in the research base. However, most of the studies follow one philosophical paradigm or style; Positivism (or Essentialism), mirroring natural science. Indeed, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002) states unequivocally that programs and practices in education be "proven effective through rigorous scientific research."

This should not surprise anyone. If the climate is one of accountability, then efficiency, control, and outcome performance become restrictive. Rather than perceiving education as broad in focus, measurement of outcomes converges on the smallest number of criteria in the attempt to show the most statistical significance. Science is good; and "the numbers" tell us exactly what learning (and teaching) are occurring in classrooms across the nation.

The Root of the Matter

Natural science and positivist research design are the foundation for many fields of inquiry. Gifted education is no exception. The field developed from the traditions of psychology, natural science, and history. Only recently are the influences of anthropology, linguistics, and sociology affecting the thinking of scholars—and in some cases, researchers.

As theory and design challenge existing thoughts about giftedness and talent development, new space opens to extend what we currently know and experience working with gifted children. It is not so much a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1970), but rather a broadening of acceptance and understanding. Research design and methodology following the guidance of descriptive and interpretive positions add to, rather than supplant the existing literature base.

By increasing our awareness that there are many different ways of approaching a research question, we provide possibilities for discussion and exploration that may not exist in our personal historical literature base. This is good news for doctoral students and "junior" faculty attempting to find their niche; but, highly problematic for many leaders in the field (and for the NCLB Act!).

Shore, Cornell, Robinson and Ward, in 1991, published *Recommended Practices in Gifted Education: A Critical Analysis*. In essence, this compendium of 101 annotated practices laid out clear guidelines about what was known, and what could be done in the future to enrich the research base in Gifted Education. This was a first-of-its-kind guide for scholarly work in gifted education, meant to facilitate broad understanding. But the focus remained positivist in nature. Few opportunities to explore the inner being of gifted/talented individuals (the Self in postmodern phenomenology) were put forth.

For example, relating to the need for early intervention and special identification for gifted underachievers, the following research needs are identified:

> Studies that document economically feasible identification procedures for underachieving gifted students would be helpful. One might locate school districts that have an explicit component for serving this special population and investigate both student outcome measures and identification costs in order to determine the extent of the resources needed to effectively identify underachieving gifted. (Shore et al., 1991, p. 264)

These suggested studies focus on measurable outcomes and comparison across groups to identify observable differences. They also directly address

accountability issues and examination of current practices of identification to validate economic impact. However, no suggestions are provided focusing on the lot of students in the classrooms, or the examination of relationships between social expectations, personal beliefs and the curriculum (overt, hidden or null).

What If?

Wouldn't it also be constructive to know about the personal experiences of everyone involved in the educational setting? About the way the curriculum plays out in specific classrooms? About the alignment of "student outcome measures" to the lives of the students and the needs of the local community?

These questions can only adequately be addressed through descriptive methods such as Ethnography, Phenomenology and Hermeneutic Inquiry. Ethnography can provide the essence of the setting as interpreted by a researcher. Indeed, a researcher from a different ethnic or socio-economic position extends the interpretive lens in this setting. By comparing across sociological borders, the ethnographic narrative adds richness and depth of description.

Phenomenology provides a means of exploring the stories of the underachievers themselves; using their own words and lived experience to detail the milieu. The researcher provides no interpretation; participants' vignettes and cases supply varied looks into the lives of individuals bearing the label.

Hermeneutics gives multiple perspectives on a setting. It can incorporate ethnographic narrative, phenomenological vignettes and a multitude of other approaches (including essentialist approaches of measurement) into a kaleidoscopic text for readers. Readers are invited to interpret the overall meaning of the text. Connection to personal life and experiences are free for association with the ultimate effect of circling back into the text as matches are made between the reader's life experience and those described in the multifaceted text (Gadamer, 1976).

Time to Change?

Perhaps the threshold of the Kuhnian paradigm shift *has* been reached. Perhaps the historical record, with all its attempts to validate the expertise of researchers at the personal expense of the researched is misplaced. Perhaps the NCLB Act is a misguided attempt to treat an open, interactive system (education) as a closed, controllable set of variables (instructional methods and practices) constantly confounded by those darn students and teachers in schools. Change may be in the air.

Change is a circuitous and complex process. Many conjoined elements need to be considered, explored and addressed as the process occurs. On an even broader perspective, the postmodern challenge is to accept the organic nature of this process as well. The elements are not independent of themselves. They connect, interact with, and influence one another in ways much broader than the sum of their individual parts.

Let me move away from the modernist pattern of vocabulary; literally, stepping into the spiritual and mystic realm. There is no linear progression to follow. Time and space become intermingled, with complexity and chaos, the patterns to be reckoned with in scholarly (and theoretical) design (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984).

> We do not conceive of sudden, radical, irrational change as built into the very fabric of existence. Yet it is. And chaos theory teaches us, Malcolm said, that straight linearity, which we have come to take for granted in everything from physics to fiction, simply does not exist. Linearity is an artificial way of viewing the world. Real life isn't a series of interconnected events occurring one after another like beads strung on a necklace. Life is actually a series of encounters in which one event may change those that follow in a wholly unpredictable, even devastating way. That's a deep truth about the structure of our universe. But, for some reason, we insist on behaving as if it were not true.
>
> Michael Crichton, Jurassic Park (1990) p. 171

In the postmodern moment, positivism wanes – confused, frustrated and often scared.

Yet it is just this confusion and loss of leadership that gifted education needs in order to more adequately perceive, expect and understand needs of the gifted person. The more intrinsic and extrinsic explorations we can muster, the greater descriptive "power" to share with others what giftedness and talent mean to an "insider" bearing the label; to an "outsider" attempting to know giftedness and talent; and, to the collective human society in all its often myopic splendor.

From the Field: Research and Experts

A visit to the current landscape of research in gifted education might help delineate the fallacies associated with Positivist means to an end. I wonder here about validity, reliability, transferability, and context of the national study underway by Dr. Reis and others regarding underachievement. Just how much "impact" value can this national study, intent on fixing underachievers in schools, really have for a child in third grade in Muleshoe, Texas?

Comparisons might be possible. But, I do not believe procedures meant to "fix" underachievement for the child in Muleshoe can be devised based on schools, cultures and social norms condensed into a generic data set—even if the sample size (N) is adequate to the design!

The research focal point is *schools* or even more onerously, *states*, *regions* or *the nation*; not the individual children in the classrooms. Will the nationally derived "norms" give teachers a worthwhile fix for their classrooms? Or, will the national focus on underachievement—often defined through the eyes of the beholder anyway—continue to limit the ability to see and accept that different kids have different needs; indeed, every day?

The methodology might be acceptable; even elegant—yet the outcomes completely worthless!

Look at the "bigger picture." Many Americans are very content labeling and then self-medicating differences away. Just visit any local drugstore and look down the long racks of over-the-counter remedies for literally any ailment. Is it such a far stretch to see that giftedness, self-selective learning, and reaction to a stifling environment (read underachievement by many!) are headed down this simplistic path—identify, prescribe, medicate away? Put your faith in the experts. They obviously have all the answers (just look at the opening pages of the *Parallel Curriculum Model* (2001)—who can muster the power to contend with that?)

The Mythopoet Arrives

This critical essay provides a discussion of possibilities. It is not meant to circumvent past, current, or future research following a more traditional design using quantitative methods—although these were bracketed out for discussion (Pinar, 1975). My focus is not on lambasting current practices; it is upon opening up space for discussion about possibilities.

It is an *Aha*! A point in time where alternatives are explored that add engaging (and perhaps exciting!) opportunities and understanding to the many concepts intermingled in giftedness. The possibilities are only just being realized. In this broadened focus, a playful sense of hopefulness exists: Hopefulness that we can reach beyond the limitations of scientific measurement *of* the gifted to a more ethereal, holistic understanding about *being* gifted.

Giftedness is not well understood in theory – or reality. We are on the cusp of realizing a myriad set of perspectives that can only enhance our knowledge, understanding and ability to be in the field of gifted education. The aesthetic, poetic and spiritual perspectives all have something to add to our discussions and understandings.

Although perhaps a bit ahead of the times in scholarly focus, I leave you with the sense of giftedness in a more tangential form to consider the possibilities of space and place we share in the world: *The Being of Gifted,* an example of mythopoetics, was compiled based on my personal interactions with gifted individuals over many years (see Figure 1). It is at once a descriptive, yet autobiographical account of giftedness.

The intent is not explanatory, or theoretical. It is a descriptive account of a general state of affairs faced by many gifted learners in schools. It also bears witness to an aesthetic sense or set of feelings that builds in my psyche as I work.

Many details of this interpretive and social framework need yet be worked out, but, as an introduction to a poetic and aesthetic representation of giftedness perhaps this discussion can begin a conceptualization process inviting others into the journey.

Scholars and theorists in our field talk past one another much more often than they engage ideas. Please feel invited to contact me with your thoughts and comments.

The Being of Gifted

There are only possibilities.
But too many.
I want no jealousy, no malice, no labels levied upon me for who I am.
I only want to be.

I wish the future, dwell on the past, but sometimes forget the present.
I feel my interests, my passions when others want to belong and believe.
I act through my soul; sometimes Old as it might be.

To most others, I am:
Nerd
Geek
Encyclopedia of Homework Solutions

To my friend…well, I have only one!
I am fellow traveler beyond the edge of most reality.

To me? I'm not sure. I'll go faster
Or slower; to seep into the subject.
Or, cruise along without any focus at all.
It all depends on my flow of emotion; my deep well of wonder—or PRESSURE.

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Figure 1: Example of Mythopoetics

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CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS DIVISION NEWSLETTER GRADUATE STUDENT PUBLICATION AWARD CALL FOR PAPERS

The Conceptual Foundations Division of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) offers a yearly award for the outstanding paper published in the Conceptual Foundations Newsletter by a graduate student. The award provides $250 toward the expenses for attendance at a future annual NAGC convention. The winner will receive the award at the convention during the annual division business meeting.

The winning paper will be selected from submissions that meet the following criteria:

- Congruence with the purpose of the Conceptual Foundations Division: The division explores and clarifies theory, concepts of giftedness and talent, philosophical foundations, trends, issues, and future directions, historical perspectives, and perspectives from outside the field of gifted education. The paper will challenge and/or extend thinking in the field.
- Quality of construction: The paper is well written and carefully designed, following the conventions of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th edition.
- The manuscript is between 500 and 1000 words in length (including references).
- The author is a graduate student at the time of submission.

Contributions will be peer reviewed by a subcommittee from the division. The winning paper and other selected submissions will be published in an issue of the division newsletter. Manuscripts submitted before September 1st of a given year will be considered for the award in the same year. Manuscripts received after September 1st will be considered for the following year.

Contributors must submit the manuscript as an e-mail attachment to the following address:

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HAVE AN ARTICLE YOU'D LIKE PUBLISHED?

We are always interested in articles about the conceptual foundations of gifted education. We particularly enjoy theoretical, innovative, and reflective articles which promote deep and fresh ideas, but any article of interest to Division members will be considered. Please submit by 8/15/06.

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