

Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration and Giftedness: Overexcitability Research Findings

Sal Mendaglio
University of Calgary

William Tillier
Solicitor General, Alberta

During the past 20 years, a significant body of literature has emerged focusing on the application of Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration (TPD) to the study of gifted individuals. Although much of this literature is prescriptive, some research reports spanning this time period are available. A perusal of research on TPD's applicability to gifted individuals indicates that the focus has been Dabrowski's notion of overexcitability (OE). This article reviews OE research, contrasts it with Dabrowski's approach to research with gifted individuals, and argues that researchers should emulate Dabrowski's approach in future investigations.

Introduction

Since the 1980s, the theory of positive disintegration (TPD; Dabrowski, 1964, 1967, 1970, 1972) has been applied to understanding various aspects of giftedness, especially within the socioemotional domain. For example, TPD has been used to explore gifted persons' emotional sensitivity and intensity (Fiedler, 1998); to make a case for the misdiagnosis of gifted persons' traits as disorders (e.g., attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder [Flint, 2001] or high-functioning autism [Cash, 1999]); to describe social and emotional needs of adolescents (Tieso, 1999); to identify creative personality characteristics (Schiever, 1985); to assess social and emotional needs (Gust, 1996); to propose an interplay between

Sal Mendaglio is Associate Professor, Division of Teacher Preparation, Graduate Division of Educational Research, and Research Associate, Centre for Gifted Education, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. William Tillier is a Forensic Psychologist, Ministry of the Solicitor General and Public Security, Alberta, Canada.

Journal for the Education of the Gifted. Vol. 30, No. 1, 2006, pp. 68–87. Copyright ©2006 Prufrock Press Inc., <http://www.prufrock.com>

developmental potential and spiritual development (Morrissey, 1996); to counsel gifted persons (Hazell, 1999; Mendaglio, 1998; Ogburn Colangelo, 1989); and to conceptualize suicide (Gust-Brey & Cross, 1999). Overexcitability (OE) has been the Dabrowskian concept of choice in the application of TPD to giftedness and gifted education. Interest in OE has extended to researchers' seeking empirical support for the application of TPD to gifted individuals. The purpose of this article is twofold: to explore research literature in this area, including Dabrowski's (1967, 1972) research with gifted youth and to encourage future researchers to emulate Dabrowski by conceptualizing OE within the larger context of developmental potential (DP).

Overexcitability: Conceptual and Operational Definitions

In Dabrowski's theory, OE is a heightened physiological experience of sensory stimuli resulting from increased sensitivity of the neurons. Dabrowski (1972) used the phrase *psychic overexcitability* and defined it as "higher than average responsiveness to stimuli, manifested either by psychomotor, sensual, emotional (affective), imaginal, or intellectual excitability, or the combination thereof" (p. 303). Piechowski (1975) stated, "Overexcitability means that the response exceeds the stimulus input" (p. 270). Piechowski (1991) noted that Dabrowski used the term *psychic overexcitability* to "underline the enhancement and intensification of mental activity much beyond the ordinary" (p. 287). The five manifestations of overexcitability, commonly called the five OEs, underlie the conceptual and operational definitions used by researchers.

Dabrowski's theory describes five different levels of personality development that he observed in human populations. These different levels reflect differences in the psychological characteristics of individuals that, in turn, reflect the potential for advanced development of personality. Dabrowski used the term *developmental potential* to refer to the constellation of psychological features that he believed were associated with advanced personality development. These characteristics include three main features: (1) special abilities and tal-

ents (like athletic or unique musical ability), (2) the five forms of overexcitability, and (3) a strong autonomous drive to achieve individuality. Dabrowski also advanced the idea that the major process of development involves a breakdown of the existing psychological structures, allowing the individual to examine his or her own values, emotions, behavior, and other personality characteristics consciously. This breakdown takes the form of nervousness and psychoneuroses (essentially strong anxieties and depressions). Development resolves these internal conflicts and results in a strong, unique, autonomous, and authentic value and personality structure.

Conceptual Definition Evident in OE Research

Perusal of the empirical literature on OE reveals a consensus on its conceptual definition. Piechowski's (1975, 1979, 1986, 1991) elaboration of OE forms the conceptual basis. Tucker and Hafenstein's (1997) précis of Piechowski's (1979) elaboration on the topic typifies how researchers conceptually define OE:

Psychomotor Overexcitability. The manifestations of psychomotor excitability are essentially of two kinds: surplus of energy and nervousness. In nervousness, the emotional tension is translated into psychomotor activity such as tics, nail biting, or impulsive behavior . . . The surplus of energy can be observed in animated gestures and taking on self-improvement tasks. . . .

Sensual Overexcitability. Sensual overexcitability is expressed in heightened experiencing of sensory pleasures and in seeking sensual outlets for inner tension . . . other manifestations of sensual overexcitability include marked interest in clothes and appearance, fondness for jewelry and ornaments . . .

Intellectual Overexcitability. The manifestations of intellectual overexcitability are associated with an intensified and accelerated activity of the mind. Its strongest expressions have more to do with striving for understanding, probing

the unknown, and love of truth than with learning per se or academic achievement . . .

Imaginational Overexcitability. The presence of imaginational overexcitability can be inferred from frequent distraction, wandering attention, and daydreaming. These occur as consequence of free play of the imagination. Here, too, belong illusions, animistic thinking, expressive image and metaphor, invention and fantasy . . .

Emotional Overexcitability. Among the five forms of psychic overexcitability, the manifestations of emotional overexcitability are the most numerous. They include certain characteristic and easily recognizable somatic expressions, extremes of feeling, inhibition, strong affective memory, concern with death, anxieties, fears, feelings of guilt, and depressive and suicidal moods. . . . (p. 68, boldface and ellipses in original)

Operational Definitions

Similar to the conceptual view of OEs, there is agreement on the operational definition of OE. With some exceptions, OE is assessed with the Overexcitability Questionnaire (OEQ; Lysy & Piechowski, 1983). Bouchet and Falk (2001) used the OEQ II (Falk, Lind, Miller, Piechowski, & Silverman, 1999), Bouchard (2004) developed her own measure (ElemenOE), while Tucker and Hafenstein (1997) used qualitative case-study methods, and Dabrowski (1970, 1972) used medical-psychological evaluation. These operational definitions are described below.

1. OEQ consists of 21 open-ended questions designed to assess the presence and intensity of the 5 OEs. Respondents are asked to provide written answers to questions designed to elicit descriptions of personal experiences that are theoretically related to OEs. Regarding its administration, there are no time limits and no supervision of the respondents. Scoring of the OEQ requires trained raters who assign numerical values to responses indicating whether there is

evidence of the presence of a particular OE and, if so, its intensity (see Lysy & Piechowski, 1983).

2. The OEQ II is a 50-item self-report questionnaire asking participants to provide their responses to items using a Likert scale. The items were the result of a process of item selection, which began with the use of data from hundreds of participants' responses to the OEQ. Scoring for each OE is based on a total score of the items related to each OE (Bouchet & Falk, 2001)
3. ElemenOE is a 30-item observation checklist designed for use by teachers to rate OEs in elementary school children. Teachers use a Likert scale to rate children's behaviors, presumed to be indicative of OEs, in terms of frequency and intensity (Bouchard, 2004).
4. Qualitative case study methods include purposeful sampling, analysis of documents, observation, and interviewing. Tucker and Hafenstein's (1997) application of these methods began with teacher nominations of children who manifested all OEs. These children were randomly selected to participate. They examined their school records and conducted nonparticipant observations of the children and semistructured interviews with their teachers (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997).
5. Medical-psychological evaluation designates a combination of assessment strategies. These include psychiatric, neurological, and psychological testing; history taking; interviewing; and case study (see Dabrowski, 1967, 1972).

Overexcitabilities: Research Findings

Review of research on OE and giftedness is presented in chronological order beginning with the older reports to illustrate how research on the topic has evolved. The notable exception is Dabrowski's research. It is presented last so that researchers' approaches and findings can be contrasted with his work in this area.

Silverman and Ellsworth (1981) designed a study to assess two hypotheses; namely, gifted individuals have higher developmental potential, as manifested by greater OEs than nongifted individuals, and gifted individuals have higher intellectual, emotional, and imaginal than sensual and psychomotor OEs. As a preliminary test of these hypotheses, Silverman and Ellsworth analyzed the data of 31 identified gifted adults' (i.e., artists, members of Mensa or eligible members based on test scores, and former students in gifted education programs) responses to the OEQ, designed to assess overexcitability, and the Definition Response Instrument (DRI; Gage, Morse & Piechowski, 1981), developed to assess levels of development (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983). Silverman and Ellsworth also compared their sample's responses with Lysy's (1979) data on counselors and noncounselors (Lysy & Piechowski). Findings included elevated OE scores among the intellectually gifted adults, with scores on emotional and intellectual OEs being equal. Further, the intellectually gifted adult group scored substantially higher than Lysy's sample on intellectual, imaginal, and emotional OEs.

Lysy and Piechowski (1983) were primarily interested in studying the process of development. The participants of this study included counselors because the researchers reasoned that counselors have a significant interest in personal growth and development. Noncounselors formed a comparison group. Secondarily, the investigators were interested in validating two measures of psychological growth, namely the OEQ and the DRI. The DRI consists of six open-ended items created to assess for Dabrowskian levels of development. Both instruments were administered to the participants, 20 in the counseling group and 22 in the noncounseling group. Both groups consisted of adult participants who were either graduate students or employed in counseling and other professions. Significant differences between groups were found for OEs but not for levels of development. Counselors scored higher than noncounselors on sensual and imaginal OEs. However, they scored lower on the intellectual OE. There were no significant differences found on the groups' scores on the DRI.

Piechowski and Cunningham (1985) attempted to uncover patterns of OEs in 13 artists. These participants shared a "serious

involvement with artistic or creative work at professional, vocational or long-standing avocational levels" (p. 158). Data were collected by using the OEQ and interviews. The researchers derived three patterns of OE constellations using the amount of interaction among the OEs and the amount of emotional OE to construct the patterns. In Pattern A, the OEs were highly interactive with similar amounts of emotional OE and imaginal OE. In Pattern B, emotional OE was particularly strong, overshadowing the other OEs. In Pattern C, emotional OE was lower, with psychomotor and sensual OEs higher. The researchers described Pattern A as balanced and integrated, Pattern B as emotionally vulnerable, and Pattern C as polarized and restless.

Piechowski and Cunningham (1985) also compared their participants' responses with those of the intellectually gifted adult participants in Silverman and Ellsworth's (1981) study. Imaginal OE was found to be the most significant difference between the artist group and the intellectually gifted group, with the artists scoring higher. In addition, the artists scored higher on emotional OE.

Piechowski, Silverman, and Falk (1985), in a comparative study, explored the mental functioning of intellectually and artistically gifted adults. Their sample consisted of two groups: 37 intellectually gifted adults and 23 artists. Data gathered in a previous study (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983) whose sample consisted of 42 graduate students were also used in the analyses. Participants in both studies completed the OEQ. The artist group scored significantly higher than graduate students on all five OEs and higher than the intellectually gifted group on emotional and imaginal OEs. The intellectually gifted group scored higher than the graduate students on emotional, imaginal, and intellectual OEs.

Schiever (1985) compared OE profiles of students in a gifted education program on a measure of creativity. Her sample consisted of 21 seventh-grade students. Participants completed the OEQ and the Something About Myself (SAM) part of the Khatena Torrance Creative Perception Inventory (Khatena & Torrance, 1976). Using the scores on the SAM, Schiever grouped her participants into high- and low-creativity groups. The high-creativity group scored significantly higher on imaginal, emotional, and intellectual OEs. There were no group differences on psychomotor and sensual OEs.

Gallagher (1986) investigated the possibility of a significant difference in OEs when comparing groups of children high and low on creativity, gifted children, and children who are not gifted. Her participants were 24 sixth-grade students attending the same school; 12 children were in the school's program for gifted students, and 12 were selected randomly. There were no significant correlations found between the scores on Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking and OEQ data. When participants were split into high- and low-creativity groups using Verbal Subtest scores, the scores of the highly creative group were higher on imaginal OE. When the Figural Subtest scores were used to create high- and low-creativity groups, the highly creative group scored higher on psychomotor OE. When comparing gifted students and students not identified as gifted, significant differences were found on intellectual, imaginal, and emotional OEs in favor of the gifted group. No differences were found on the other OEs.

Lewis and Kitano (1992) investigated affective characteristics of academically gifted adults using a concept of psychological intensities and a mixed-research design (quantitative and qualitative methods). Psychological intensity was constructed by combining Clark's (1983) notion of concomitant problems, associated with Clark's work on characteristics of gifted students, and Dabrowski's concept of overexcitabilities (Piechowski, 1979). The researchers developed a questionnaire to assess intensity characteristics. The sample consisted of 31 academically high-achieving adults. The achievement criterion was operationally defined as admission to a doctoral program in education. The primary purpose of the study was to determine whether, and to what extent, high-achieving adults are characterized by psychological intensities. The researchers analyzed the quantitative data obtained by the use of their questionnaire with the entire sample and the qualitative data gathered from 11 students who participated in focus groups. The purpose of this aspect of the study was to explore perceptions of psychological intensities. Statistical analyses of the questionnaire data provided support for the concomitant-problems model rather than the Dabrowskian model. Qualitative analyses of the focus-group data provided most support for psychological intensities in the realms of intellectual and emotional intensities;

some support was found for imaginal and sensual intensities. However, there was no support for psychomotor intensity.

Miller, Silverman, and Falk (1994), in a comparative study, hypothesized that intellectually gifted adults' measured OEs and level of development would be higher than OEs of a group of graduate students; that there would be no gender differences; and that developmental potential as measured by OEs—specifically intellectual, imaginal, and emotional—would predict level of development. Participants consisted of 41 intellectually gifted adults recruited for the study and data on 42 graduate students retrieved from a previous study (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983). All participants completed the OEQ and the DRI (Lysy & Piechowski). The hypothesis that intellectually gifted adults would score higher on OEs than graduate students was partially supported by the finding that the intellectually gifted group scored higher on emotional and intellectual OEs than the comparison group. Regarding the second hypothesis, some gender differences were found on OEs: Women scored higher on emotional OE and men scored higher on intellectual OE. No gender differences were reported on the other OEs. On the DRI, women scored significantly higher than did men. The third hypothesis was not supported: There was no difference between the intellectually gifted group and graduate students on the DRI. The gifted group did not manifest a higher level of development, despite having higher scores on the OEs.

Ackerman (1997) conducted an exploratory study aimed at assessing the use of OEs as an alternate means of identifying gifted students. Seventy-nine high school students, 42 of whom were identified gifted, formed the sample. Participants completed the OEQ. Findings indicated that the identified gifted group's OE profile contained higher scores on psychomotor, intellectual, and emotional OEs. Psychomotor OE contributed most to the differentiation between groups.

Falk, Manzanero, and Miller (1997) conducted a cross-cultural study attempting to add further validity to previous findings that artists exhibit high intellectual, imaginal, and, emotional OEs. Participants were recruited through a Venezuelan school of fine arts. The sample consisted of both professional and amateur

artists. Twenty-seven Venezuelan artists completed a Spanish translation of the OEQ. Twenty-three American artists from a previous study (Piechowski et al., 1985) constituted a comparison group. The OE profile of the Venezuelan artists was virtually the same as the American artists: emotional, imaginal, and intellectual OEs were substantially higher than the sensual and psychomotor OEs. American artists scored significantly higher on psychomotor OE than did the Venezuelans.

Tucker and Hafenstein (1997) used a qualitative, multiple case-study design to describe the manifestations of OEs in young gifted children. Early childhood teachers were asked to nominate children whom the teachers believed manifested all of the OEs. From the pool of nominees, the researchers randomly selected five children. Tucker and Hafenstein used several data sources, including classroom observations, school documents, and interviews with the children's teachers. Findings indicated that all five children manifested behaviors Tucker and Hafenstein associated with intellectual, imaginal, and emotional OEs. Two of the children also manifested behaviors associated with psychomotor and sensual OEs.

Bouchet and Falk (2001) tested two hypotheses: (1) university students who attended gifted education programs have greater emotional, intellectual, and imaginal OEs than those who did not, and (2) gender differences exist in OE scores, such that women score higher on emotional and sensual and men score higher on intellectual and psychomotor OEs. The sample consisted of 562 undergraduate university students. The OEQ II (Falk et al., 1999) was administered to assess participants' OEs. A second questionnaire asked participants to indicate whether they participated in gifted education, Advanced Placement courses, or standard programs in high school. Results provided partial support for the hypothesis that those students who attended gifted education programs have higher emotional, imaginal, and intellectual OEs. Specifically, when compared to the other two groups, the gifted group did score significantly higher on two of the three OEs, namely, emotional and intellectual. Gender differences were also found. Females scored higher on emotional and sensual, and males scored higher on intellectual, imaginal, and psychomotor OEs.

Bouchard (2004), similar to Ackerman (1997), was interested in using the OEs as a means of identifying gifted students. She detailed the development of an instrument with the goal of using it to identify elementary school children. The ElemenOE is a Likert-scaled checklist designed for use by teachers to select children for gifted education programs. Teacher ratings were obtained on 96 identified gifted children and 75 nonidentified gifted children. Analyses of the teacher ratings indicated that the two groups differed only on intellectual and psychomotor OE scores in favor of the gifted group. As with Ackerman's finding, psychomotor ratings contributed most to distinguishing between the two groups.

Summary

Taken as a group, findings indicate partial support for the predicted OE profile. The greatest support for the claim that gifted persons manifest the profile of elevated imaginal, intellectual, and emotional OEs—the Big Three—with depressed sensual and psychomotor OEs is found in the studies with adult participants. Further, the strongest support is found in studies that used creativity as a criterion, particularly when this was demonstrated in artistic productions.

Of the eight studies where adults constituted the samples, research with artists lend the greatest support for the OE profile associated with multilevel development. Piechowski et al. (1985) reported elevated scores on all OEs for the American artists they studied. Venezuelan artists' profile, similar to American artists, in the Falk et al. (1997) study manifested the elevated scores on emotional, intellectual, and imaginal OEs. Piechowski and Cunningham's (1985) study with artists also provided support.

With one exception, when intellectually gifted adults constituted the samples, partial support is found. Silverman and Ellsworth (1981) found that their sample of intellectually gifted adults scored substantially higher on the three critical OEs than nonidentified gifted adults. Four studies (Lewis & Kitano, 1992; Lysy & Piechowski, 1983; Miller et al., 1994; Bouchet & Falk, 2001) provide varying levels of partial support.

Of the four studies with children or adolescents as participants, two studies provide support for the expected OE profile. In Tucker and Hafenstein's (1997) qualitative study, the five gifted children nominated by their teachers manifested behaviors associated with all OEs. Gallagher's (1986) identified gifted group scored higher than the nongifted group on the three key OEs.

Research with larger samples of adolescents and children, however, did not lend significant support. In fact, both Ackerman (1997) and Bouchard (2004) found that psychomotor OE contributed most significantly to differentiating between gifted and nongifted groups, with gifted participants scoring higher on this OE.

Dabrowski's Research With Gifted Individuals: Beyond OEs

Dabrowski (1967, 1972) reported his research with gifted youth in two places. The accounts are substantially the same, with minor differences. For example, Dabrowski used the term "outstanding abilities" (p. 251) in 1967, whereas he used "superior abilities" (p. 204) in 1972. Both terms referred to abilities that allow an individual to achieve at a level surpassing significantly the standard accepted for those of similar age and education. The more recent account is the basis for this summary.

Dabrowski's stated purpose was to investigate the relationship between two sets of characteristics: superior abilities and psychoneuroses. Dabrowski (1972) defined superior abilities as "abilities (in any field), which permit an individual to achieve results considerably surpassing the average accepted as standard for individuals of the same age and the same level of education" (p. 204). Superior abilities were divided into two types: general and special. Superior general abilities were ascribed to the elementary school children in his sample and were grouped into humanistic, mathematical, and scientific. Superior special abilities, said to characterize students attending art school, included drama, dance, art, and music. Psychoneurosis is defined as "a more or less organized form of growth through positive disintegration" (p. 303).

The sample consisted of 80 youth (aged 8 to 23). Thirty participants were intellectually gifted elementary school children; 50 participants attended art schools, studying ballet, theatre, and art. A comparison group of 30 developmentally delayed youth was also included in the sample. Participants were assessed using a combination of medical and psychological procedures. Neurological and psychiatric examinations were conducted on all participants. Psychological assessment was conducted using the Wechsler-Bellevue (Wechsler, 1939); the Rorschach (Rorschach, 1921); the Thematic Apperception Test (Murray, 1943), a questionnaire designed to assess for the presence of psychoneurotic traits and signs of forces associated with positive disintegration; interview; and case study.

Dabrowski (1972) reported that “[e]very one of the children investigated showed considerable psychomotor, sensual, affectional [emotional], intellectual mental overexcitability” (p. 205). Dabrowski concluded that there is a relationship between superior abilities and psychoneuroses. He noted that his sample’s various interests and abilities coincided with complex psychoneurotic manifestations, that is, with signs of potential for advanced development.

It is evident from the description of his research that Dabrowski assessed more than his participants’ OEs. He assessed their developmental potential (DP). Dabrowski (1972) defined DP as the

constitutional endowment, which determines the character and the extent of mental growth possible for a given individual. The developmental potential can be assessed on the basis of the following components: psychic overexcitability . . . , special abilities and talents, and autonomous factors (notably the Third factor). (p. 293)

In addition to OEs and special abilities and talents, DP includes autonomous forces that are called *dynamisms* in TPD. Dynamisms are defined as a “[b]iological or mental force controlling behavior and its development. Instincts, drives, and intellectual processes combined with emotions are dynamisms (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 294). Dabrowski (1972, 1973) noted that a few dynamisms, including the third factor, were the sine qua non of the developmental process. (The third factor will be discussed in detail below.)

Piechowski (1975) also emphasized the importance of dynamisms in his definition of developmental potential:

Developmental potential is the original endowment which determines what level of development a person may reach if the physical and environmental conditions are optimal. Developmental potential has certain defining characteristics which allow us to detect its presence and measure its strength. The defining characteristics of DP are forms of overexcitability and developmental dynamisms. *Dynamisms* [italics in original] are intrapsychic processes of positive disintegration which shape development and the expression of behavior. Each level of development has a different set of dynamisms. (p. 250)

In a similar vein to Dabrowski, Piechowski (1975) is emphatic about the centrality of dynamisms (e.g., self-awareness, dissatisfaction with self, and empathy) in positive disintegration: For Piechowski, dynamisms are not forces carrying out disintegration, they “*are* [italics in original] the disintegration” (p. 277).

The third factor is a particularly important dynamism that appears only after other dynamisms such as subject-object in oneself and inner psychic transformation are well established. As such, the third factor is evident at a high level of mental development. Dabrowski (1973) admitted that this dynamism is particularly difficult to define. Although connected to one’s heredity and environment, it transcended these two factors. The third factor does not appear in a prefabricated form—it arises gradually in certain individuals who, as a result of their inner struggles, develop sustained self-consciousness. Such individuals become controlled by their inner voices and values rather than by their heredity and environment. Increased consciousness, self-determination, authenticity, and autonomy are the hallmarks of the third factor. Dabrowski (1973) defined it as follows:

The third factor is a dynamism active at the stage of organized multilevel disintegration. Its activity is autonomous in relation to the first (hereditary) and the second (environmental) factor. It consists in a selective attitude with regard

to the properties of one's own character and temperament, as well as to environmental influences. This dynamism paves the way for the impact of the ideal of personality upon the individual. (p. 80)

Developmental Potential and Dynamisms in Dabrowski's Research With Gifted Students

References to developmental potential and specific dynamisms are evident in Dabrowski's (1972) discussion of research findings. Developmental potential is discussed in a case that Dabrowski used to illustrate his findings:

His [8-year-old grade-three boy] *developmental potential* [italics added] can be seen in the combination of his fairly high excitability with inhibition, in the combination of his sensitivity, impatience and anger with states of anxiety, and above all his sensitivity to unjust treatment, his strong relationship with mother, a feeling of inferiority in respect to himself, and his feeling of responsibility and systematic approach to his schoolwork. (p. 208)

Dynamisms, including the third factor, are noted in discussing the role of creative abilities in development in his sample:

Among older youths the majority of creative abilities was displayed by individuals with a very advanced development (i.e., multilevel disintegration) of their internal psychic milieu. We have assessed in these individuals their enhanced emotional overexcitability and initial activity of such *dynamisms like subject-object in oneself, the third factor, forms of periodical self-control* [italics added]. (p. 218)

Although Dabrowski was studying the relationship of special abilities and indicators of positive disintegration, he assessed the DP of his participants. This approach to researching his theory suggests that Dabrowski believed that components of DP operate in an inte-

grated manner. Those interested in applying TPD to giftedness and gifted education should consider emulating Dabrowski's approach.

Research findings on the application of TPD may be reflective of an exclusive focus on OEs. The findings with adult artists—the samples that provide consistent support for elevated OEs, especially the Big Three—add support to this possibility. In addition to elevated OEs, adult artists possess superior talents (superior special abilities). They have had the opportunity to engage in experiences leading to inner struggles and the birth of self-consciousness (evidence of dynamisms). Other samples of adults and children alike may not have had other components of DP, which may explain the findings. In other words, individuals meeting criteria for gifted programs may be intelligent and may even have elevated intellectual OEs, but may be lacking in other aspects of DP. Intellectual giftedness may be a prerequisite for the potential for advanced development, but it may not be sufficient for multilevel development (Mendaglio & Pyryt, 2004; Nixon, 2005; Silverman & Ellsworth, 1981). By using all components of DP in applying TPD to gifted individuals, we should be in a better position to confirm or disconfirm claims regarding the applicability of TPD to giftedness and gifted education.

Conclusion

For both Dabrowski and Piechowski, OEs represent only a partial view of DP. OEs are inextricably bound to the other components of DP. To provide empirical support for a Dabrowskian view of development, special abilities, dynamisms, and the quality of the environment also need to be considered. Using DP and not solely OEs will prove challenging to researchers and others who are interested in the application of TPD to giftedness and gifted education. For researchers, the prospect of creating operational definitions of the other components of DP, especially dynamisms, may appear daunting. The work on the development of the now-taken-for-granted OEQ, spearheaded by Michael Piechowski, should be a source of inspiration for the work ahead. Piechowski and his associates rose to the challenge of operationalizing overexcitability; similarly, we need

to confront other aspects of Dabrowski's theory in our continuing efforts to apply it to the field of giftedness.

References

- Ackerman, C. (1997). Identifying gifted adolescents using personality characteristics: Dabrowski's overexcitabilities. *Roeper Review*, *19*, 229–236.
- Bouchard, L. L. (2004). An instrument for the measure of Dabrowskian overexcitabilities to identify gifted elementary students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, *48*, 339–350.
- Bouchet, N., & Falk, R. F. (2001). The relationship among giftedness, gender, and overexcitability. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, *45*, 260–267.
- Cash, A. B. (1999). A profile of gifted individuals with autism: The twice-exceptional learner. *Roeper Review*, *22*, 22–27.
- Clark, B. (1983). *Growing up gifted* (2nd ed.). Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.
- Dabrowski, K. (1964). *Positive disintegration*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Dabrowski, K. (1967). *Personality-shaping through positive disintegration*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Dabrowski, K. (1970). *Mental growth through positive disintegration*. London: Gryf.
- Dabrowski, K. (1972). *Psychoneurosis is not an illness*. London: Gryf.
- Dabrowski, K. (1973). *The dynamics of concepts*. London: Gryf.
- Falk, R. F., Manzanero, J. B., & Miller, N. B. (1997). Developmental potential in Venezuelan and American artists: A cross-cultural validity study. *Creativity Research Journal*, *10*, 201–206.
- Falk, R. R., Lind, S., Miller, N. B., Piechowski, M. M., & Silverman, L. K. (1999). *The Overexcitability Questionnaire—Two (OEQII): Manual, scoring system, and questionnaire*. Denver, CO: Institute for the Study of Advanced Development.
- Fiedler, E. D. (1998). Denial of anger/denial of self: Dealing with the dilemmas. *Roeper Review*, *20*, 158–161.

- Flint, L. J. (2001). Challenges of identifying and serving gifted children with ADHD. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33, 62–69.
- Gage, D. F., Morse, P. A., & Piechowski, M. M. (1981). Measuring levels of emotional development. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 103, 129–152.
- Gallagher, S. A. (1986). A comparison of the concept of overexcitabilities with measures of creativity and school achievement in sixth grade students. *Roeper Review*, 8, 115–119.
- Gust, K. L. (1996). Assessing the social and emotional needs of the gifted: Using the Children's Self-Report and Projective Inventory as a potential tool. *Gifted Child Today*, 19, 38–40.
- Gust-Brey, K., & Cross, T. (1999). An examination of the literature base on the suicidal behaviors of gifted students. *Roeper Review*, 22, 28–35.
- Hazell, C. G. (1999). The experience of emptiness and the use of Dabrowski's theory in counseling gifted clients: Clinical case examples. *Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness*, 8, 31–46.
- Khatena, J., & Torrance, E. P. (1976). *Manual for Khatena-Torrance Creative Personality Perception Inventory*. Chicago: Stoelting.
- Lewis, R. B., & Kitano, M. K. (1992). Psychological intensities in gifted adults. *Roeper Review*, 15, 25–31.
- Lysy, K. Z. (1979). Personal growth in counselors and noncounselors: A Jungian and Dabrowskian approach. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.
- Lysy, K. Z., & Piechowski M. M. (1983). Personal growth: An empirical study using Jungian and Dabrowskian measures. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 108, 267–320.
- Mendaglio, S. (1998). Counselling gifted students: Issues and recommendations for teachers and counselors. *AGATE*, 12, 18–25.
- Mendaglio, S., & Pyryt, M. C. (2004, June). The role of intelligence in Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration. In W. Tillier (Ed.), *Developmental potential—from theory to practice: Educational and therapeutic perspectives*. Unpublished manuscript. (Proceedings from the Sixth International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.)

- Miller, N. B., Silverman, L. K., & Falk, R. F. (1994). Emotional development, intellectual ability, and gender. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 18, 20–38.
- Morrissey, A. M. (1996). Intellect as prelude: The potential for higher level development in the gifted. *Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness*, 7, 101–116.
- Murray, H. A. (1943). *Thematic Apperception Test manual*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nixon, L. (2005). Potential for positive disintegration and IQ. *The Dabrowski Newsletter*, 10(2), 1–5.
- Ogburn Colangelo, M. K. (1989). Giftedness as multilevel potential: A clinical example. *Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness*, 1, 87–100.
- Piechowski, M. M. (1975). A theoretical and empirical approach to the study of development. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 92, 231–297.
- Piechowski, M. M. (1979). Developmental potential. In N. Colangelo & R. T. Zaffrann (Eds.), *New voices in counseling the gifted* (pp. 25–57). Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.
- Piechowski, M. M. (1986). The concept of developmental potential. *Roeper Review*, 8, 190–197.
- Piechowski, M. M. (1991). Emotional development and emotional giftedness. In N. Colangelo & G. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education* (pp. 285–306). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Piechowski, M. M., & Cunningham, K. (1985). Patterns of overexcitability in a group of artists. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 19, 153–174.
- Piechowski, M. M., Silverman, L., & Falk, F. (1985). Comparison of intellectually and artistically gifted on five dimensions of mental functions. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 60, 539–549.
- Rorschach, H. (1921). *Psychodiagnostics: Diagnostic perception*. New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Schiever, S. W. (1985). Creative personality characteristics and dimensions of mental functioning in gifted adolescents. *Roeper Review*, 7, 223–226.
- Silverman, L. K., & Ellsworth, B. (1981). The theory of positive disintegration and its implications for giftedness. In N. Duda (Ed.),

-
- Theory of positive disintegration: Proceedings of the third international conference* (pp. 179–194). Miami, FL: Xerox.
- Tieso, C. L. (1999). Meeting the socio-emotional needs of talented teens. *Gifted Child Today*, 22, 38–43.
- Tucker, B., & Hafenstein, N. (1997). Psychological intensities in young gifted children. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 41, 66–75.
- Wechsler, D. (1939). *The measurement of adult intelligence*. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins.