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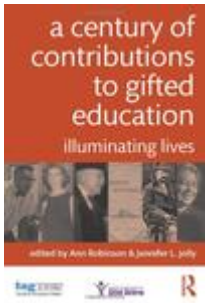

Illuminating Lives and Illuminated Concepts

A Review of

A Century of Contributions to Gifted Education: Illuminating Lives
by Ann Robinson and Jennifer L. Jolly (Eds.)
New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014. 319 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-89880-5 (hardcover); ISBN 978-0-415-89881-2 (paperback); ISBN 978-0-203-15448-9 (e-Book). $160.00, hardcover; $49.95, paperback

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A Century of Contributions to Gifted Education: Illuminating Lives is a compilation of biographic studies of 20 plus individuals whose work figured prominently in the history of gifted education over more than 100 years, starting in 1869 when Francis Galton published his *Hereditary Genius*, up to 1972, when the Marland Report, the first policy document of the U.S. federal government on gifted education, was published. Editors Ann Robinson and Jennifer L. Jolly deliberately chose this historical period that encompasses early studies of childhood giftedness and adult eminence, the mental measurement movement (especially intelligence testing), the rising interest in scientific studies of creativity, the increasing attention to cultural diversity, the establishment of a gifted education movement, and explorations in the direction of talent development. Each chapter provides a biographic account of a particular individual, and then discusses the distinct contributions the person made in the larger context of research on giftedness and gifted education.

This book should be on the must read list for anyone who is serious about gifted education and who thinks about conducting research on related topics. For those who have been working in this field for many years (like myself), this book would surely provide new insights into the works of someone they are familiar with, rekindle their passion for the work they are doing, and consolidate their commitment to this line of work that makes their life satisfactory and fulfilling.

The book's 23 chapters are roughly divided into four sections. The first few chapters are on predecessors who foretold a new field of research—gifted studies: Francis Galton, Alfred Binet, and William Du Bois. The second section focuses on early investigators, who were active in the first half of the 20th century, whose research laid a solid foundation for the field, such as Lewis Terman and Leta Hollingworth. The third section includes a set of psychological researchers and scholars, such as E. Paul Torrance and Paul Witty, working

mostly during and after World War II, whose work broadened the conceptions of giftedness and made gifted education more inclusive, reaching out to previously neglected groups, such as the creatively gifted and Black Americans. The fourth section features chapters on a group of scholars and researchers, who were most active during the 1950s and 1960s and beyond, such as A. Harry Passow and Vigil Ward, who worked at the policy and practical fronts of gifted education. The editors organized these biographic studies in an attempt to show how the field of gifted studies and education started as a branch of educational psychology and evolved to become a field of its own.

An interesting point to consider while reading these biographic studies is how biographical accounts can contribute to the knowledge of psychology and education. If understanding thinkers and researchers themselves (and their times) is important for understanding the ideas and research they produced, then biographic studies can provide insights into these contributors' mindsets and motivations that simply cannot be found in their research publications. If Holton (1981) was right in his argument that science is not rooted in formal arguments and axiomatic proofs but in what he called "themata," our deep-held beliefs about how things work and how we get to know them, then tracing these ideas means looking closely into intellectual journeys that relevant individuals lived through, and the times they lived in.

How Life Stories Provide Insights Into the Creators' and Leaders' Ideas and Work

Galton, Binet, Terman, and Hollingworth (Chapters 2, 3, 6, and 7, respectively) are among those who helped create a new field of studies. The chapter on Galton is full of fascinating details. By all accounts, Galton was a well-educated, but by and large a self-made gifted person and a renaissance man. What is telling in his life, however, is his intellectual connections with his cousin Charles Darwin and his beliefs and obsessions built on the concepts of Darwinian heritability. Terman and Hollingworth, who inherited Galton and Binet's legacies, were staunch believers in IQ-based giftedness. These early pioneers (probably excepting Binet) seemed to espouse the idea of a cognitive elite that was revived in the Bell Curve (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Many of them, starting with Galton, embraced eugenics, which became infamous because of its association with Nazi ethnic cleansing, but which can be viewed as logical if one thinks of the Darwinian evolutionary principles as paramount to human survival and growth over generations.

The authors of these chapters are candid about the controversial nature of the social positions that Terman and Hollingworth held; indeed, some of their comments were outright racist and politically incorrect by today's standards. But instead of criticizing these pioneers purely from a moral point of view, the authors try to understand their times and the logic behind their thinking, for better or worse. In this regard, it is particularly eye-opening to read Chapter 4 on William Du Bois. As an African American living in the late 19th and early 20^{th} centuries, Du Bois was combating racism throughout his life, yet he was also the early pioneer of gifted education in advocating for "the talented tenth," seeing hopes in the rise of exceptional individuals from the "Negro race." It suggests that racism (or, for that matter, classism) and giftedness do not have an inherent connection.

Among individuals featured in this volume, Kazimierz Dabrowski is unique in his background as well as his theory. Unlike Galton, Binet, and Terman, who were concerned with human

potential as a cognitive capacity issue, Dabrowski, due to his upbringing and his prisoner camp experiences in World War II, emphasized emotion and feeling as the main ingredients of giftedness. His theory also has a distinct developmental dimension, which also distinguishes it from a static view of giftedness. The imprint of his times also seems clear.

Like Piaget and many other psychologists of the early 20th century, Dabrowski's theory carried a strong philosophic overtone, even metaphysical and spiritual (considering the influence Kierkegaard had on him in his adolescent years). His theory of positive disintegration also resembles Piaget's theory of cognitive development and theories developed by his contemporaries in other fields (e.g., Saussure in linguistics and Levi-Strauss in anthropology) in their structuralist worldview.

How Ideas Evolved and Were Combated and Modified Over Generations

It is always interesting to see the development of ideas, concepts, and theories as a continual discursive process. For example, Terman's research was conducted in the context of his doubts on Lombroso's claim that gifted children and adults are more prone to mental illness. It shows that scientists have their own biases and belief systems built into their research. What redeems science as fair and objective is its self-correction mechanisms through theory-data coordination and give-and-take that eventually set things straight. Sometimes history cycles back things that once got obscured; many ideas we are currently thinking about have predecessors. For example, Witty's objection to a purely IQ-centric view of giftedness, his beliefs about the role of motivation, and his talent development approach to gifted education he helped start all have currency. I have long thought and worried about the deeply entrenched ability-centric view of giftedness in the field (e.g., Dai, 2004), not knowing that back in 1927 Witty and his colleague already pointed out that "the importance of capacity is over-emphasized and the significance of drive neglected or under-estimated" (quoted in reviewed volume, p. 121).

Ideas drive research, and research also modifies ideas. Eventually it becomes a collective memory of how much we have gained and how we sometimes stumbled and recovered. The chapters provide ample examples of recurrent themes in the field: the research conducted by Miriam Goldberg and A. Harry Passow (Chapters 16 and 17, respectively) as part of Talented Youth Project shows how research refines our thinking. A large-scale study of ability grouping led these researchers to conclude that ability grouping itself, without curricular and instructional adaptations, cannot create a miracle in learning outcomes.

The volume also contains many historical anecdotes that reveal recurrent issues and enduring problems. For example, when Terman was proposing to study intelligence and giftedness using the then new mental measurement technique, Stanley Hall, Terman's mentor, expressed qualms about "the danger of being misled by the quasi-exactness of quantitative methods" (p. 67). Similarly, while Spearman (1904) was seeking mathematic certainty of general intelligence "objectively defined and measured," Binet had a very different view: "we do not all have intelligence based on the same schemata. Several different kinds of intelligence exist, and the kind that fits one does not fit another" (p. 29). This statement was made in 1898 but still sounds current and refreshing. It is ironical that it was Binet who created the first intelligence test that lends itself to a uni-dimensional interpretation of intelligence tests. Methodologically, would he regret opening a Pandora's

Box, as it were? This thema, namely, the idiographic versus nomothetic tension, finds its expressions and variations throughout the history of psychology.

How Love and Commitment Form a Common Thread in the Field's Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

It was Galton who proposed the notion that protecting and cultivating the gifted, a precious natural resource, is an ethical principle for the sake of human survival and vitality. Hollingworth suggested a more intrinsic reason for special attention to these individuals, who present "a spectacle of compelling beauty" (quoted in reviewed volume, p. 89). Although ideas change over time, a deep appreciation of these "beautiful minds" does not. Abraham Tannenbaum, in his foreword, mentions his collaboration with one of the editors. In a way, the torch has been passed to the new generation of scholars. The contributors to this volume represent a group of well-established scholars who, by making the efforts to dig deep into the wealth of important historical documents, make *A Century of Contributions to Gifted Education* a precious collective memory of generations of scholars and researchers passing torches and continuing a journey for which they are remembered and by which the newcomers are inspired.

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