

A Review of *Explorations in Giftedness* by David Yun Dai

We live in the prison of language. Most of the time language serves us well in defining and categorizing things for us to make our lives easier, but there are occasions when we are trapped by a particular use of a word or term and suffer from what psychologists call functional fixedness, taking a word as having a fixed meaning and referent. Giftedness is such a term. We can easily reify this construct as having an invariant identity in meaning and psychological reference, and even permanent material substance, without being aware of the pragmatic function of the term in helping us identify and promote certain human qualities we deem important for the sake of advancing certain human causes. It is in this context that this new book takes on added importance.

What is giftedness? Is it one thing or many things in combination? Is there a clear line between the gifted and “non-gifted?” If a child is identified “gifted,” will he or she forever be “gifted?” The authors of this book offer their answers: it is not one thing, it is many things, important in different ways; it is even culturally relative in that each culture would define giftedness through its own cultural lens in terms of the importance of particular personal qualities. The quality deemed “gifted” is dynamically changing because it itself is developing, rather than static; moreover, giftedness demonstrated in later development involves new qualities compared to that demonstrated in early development so that we cannot even say they are the same thing.

More specifically, these ideas are expounded in Sternberg’s WICS model of giftedness, with WICS standing for Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, Synthesized. According to the WICS model, giftedness is:

a function of *creativity* in generating ideas, *analytical intelligence* in evaluating the quality of these ideas, *practical intelligence* in implementing the ideas and convincing others to value and follow the ideas, and *wisdom* to ensure that the decisions and their implementation are for the common good of all stakeholders. (p. 34)

Defined as such, giftedness is not a static quality we can readily find using psychometric or other instruments, but a developmental process whereby many elements, internal or external, need to join forces in making it happen.

Since intelligence, creativity, and wisdom are developing qualities, the authors treat giftedness as a form of developing expertise. A major shift of this approach from the traditional way of defining giftedness is that it does not treat performance on intelligence tests as enjoying psychological priority over academic achievement as if it is the former that psychologically and temporally causes the latter (i.e., committing “jangle fallacy”). Rather, it treats both as forms of developing expertise; high correlations of the two represent an overlap in construct representation rather than intelligence-achievement causation. They further define elements of giftedness as developing expertise to include skills, knowledge, motivation, and context. Their argument against the traditional IQ or academic achievement-based identification is that such a practice privileges analytic and academic skills. Furthermore, they hypothesize that, as adolescents make the transition to adulthood and face real world problems and challenges, creativity and practical intelligences become more important than academic and analytic

intelligence. In addition, the emphasis on motivation and context also moves the real time assessment of authentic learning and performance improvement (i.e., dynamic testing and assessment) to the forefront as an alternative to the traditional paper-and-pencil tasks presumably measuring important skills irrespective of the task context and motivation.

While a large portion of the book deals with theoretical issues and reports related research, which the authors have conducted to support their particular claims, the last two chapters discuss gifted identification and education, respectively. In discussing the gifted identification, the authors elaborate on the use of Aurora Project and Rainbow Project, two college admission testing programs developed by the authors and largely based on Sternberg's theory of intelligence. While conceptually relevant to K-12 gifted identification, they are not particularly tied to the literature of gifted identification in the K-12 context. Because the authors stress the importance of context in defining and identifying gifted children, the chapter on "giftedness and culture" provides thought-provoking ideas about identification and related testing and assessment issues. Readers of this book may consult the growing literature on alternative ways of gifted identification elsewhere.

In comparison, the chapter on "educating the gifted" carries many interesting ideas about how to promote analytic, creative, and practical intelligences and teaching for wisdom in the classroom. This is consistent with the developmental emphasis of the WICS model of giftedness: gifted education is not merely to educate the "gifted," however identified; more importantly, it should promote and develop the qualities we deem important for creative productivity in adulthood. The ultimate goal of gifted education, according to the authors of this book, is to develop "gifted leaders -- people who make a positive, meaningful, and enduring difference to the world" (p. 53). This seems to be a much broader, proactive, productive approach to gifted education than the traditional categorical approach that addresses putative education needs of a small percentage of children based on some arbitrary cutoff of ability-test scores in a once-and-for-all fashion.

Overall, the book is timely when gifted educators are looking for alternative models and more enriched and fruitful ways to provide education for the most able and promising students. It also adds a new, powerful voice in the scholarly and scientific discussion of the nature and development of giftedness. For example, issues of cultural specificity of giftedness, and giftedness and disability, are discussed in a thought-provoking manner. The book also brings into the field of gifted education many current developments in psychological theories and research, thereby enriching our understanding of what constitutes giftedness and how we go about developing it. It should be noted that the book is not a synthesis of the recent literature on gifted education, empirically or theoretically; nor is it a critique of the current gifted education practices. Rather, it is a systematic introduction to the WICS model of giftedness and theories and research behind the model. For that purpose, it is succinctly written, with the ideas behind WICS clearly presented, and made highly accessible to lay educated audiences.

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