

SIGNificance.

The newsletter for the AERA Research on Giftedness and Talent SIG

Spring 2008

Letter from the Chair

It is with great sadness that I must use this column to reflect on the passing of our wonderful SIG Chair, Dr. Michael Pyryt. He passed away in January, 2008, after suffering an injury while teaching in Sydney, Australia. He died shortly after getting off the plane in Calgary. His presence in our field will be sorely missed.

We will plan on holding a memorial for Michael during the AERA convention, but the exact place and time are yet to be determined. More about this will be available when we meet for the annual SIG Business Meeting on Monday evening, March 24, 2008 at 6:15-8:15 pm in the Sutton Center (2nd floor) of the Hilton New York.

As you are aware, I was set to replace Michael next summer as SIG Chair but have been asked to take on the role a few months early. I had looked forward to some quality time with Michael at this year's AERA to learn the ropes as only he – a master – could teach them. Hence, things will go on, but not as well as they would have with Michael there to guide us (me!).

I hope each and every SIG member will reflect on where they think our organization should be headed.

This year AERA has returned to New York City with all its glitter and glamour to be added to the glitter and glamour of the AERA program itself! Our SIG program looks wonderful, and all who attend will be stimulated and excited by what they will hear presented. Professor Abe Tanenbaum is our honored speaker at the

Business meeting. It will be a delight to hear him share his wisdom about the history of our field and where he thinks we are going. Fitting too that Professor Tanenbaum represents the city where so much of the origins of our field began. It should be an enlightening evening.

As for me, I will get my feet on the ground as quickly as I can. Having just relocated from Australia to the cold environs of Minnesota once again, it may take a few months to thaw out and get moving, but I promise to get into the groove as soon as possible. In the meantime, I hope each and every SIG member will reflect on where they think our organization should be headed AND, once you have figured that out, please let me know!



Karen Rogers can be reached at kbrogers@stthomas.edu

This newsletter features a tribute to Michael Pyryt.

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Message for Michael Pyryt. Excerpts from Janneke Frank's Eulogy for Michael.

Dr. Michael Christopher Pyryt 1953-2008

Michael passed away the morning of Tuesday, January 15, at the Foothills Hospital upon his return from a trip to Australia. His parents, Edward Joseph and Frances Mary Ellen (nee Loughren) Pyryt predeceased him. He is survived by his wife, Leta Gonzales-Pyryt, his daughter Tara and her husband Christopher Gales, his granddaughter Brooke, and his sister Dorothy, as well as many family members in New Jersey.

Born on June 26, 1953, in Passaic, New Jersey, Michael obtained a B.A. in Psychology in 1975 and an Ed.M. in Gifted Education in 1976 from The Johns Hopkins University. He completed his doctorate in Educational Psychology in 1984 at the University of Kansas. His subsequent distinguished professional academic career focused on gifted education. He was a tenured assistant professor at the West Virginia College of Graduate Studies, a tenured assistant professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Calgary, and from 1995 an associate professor in the Division of Applied Psychology, Faculty of Education, at the University of Calgary. In 2000, he became the Director of the Centre for Gifted Education at the University and was responsible for expanding the profile of gifted education and promoting the education of gifted children locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally. He published extensively in his field, held numerous professional memberships, and was involved in innumerable research projects.

A devout Catholic, Michael was a former runner and in addition a life-long fan of the Johns Hopkins Blue Jays lacrosse team, the University of Kansas Jayhawks and Notre Dame Fighting Irish football teams. Michael loved the many dogs and cats he had over the years, and his signature slide at the end of presentations pictured his dog, Fufu, and read, "My goal in life is to be a person as good as my dog already thinks I am." He was that and more, and he will be dearly missed by family, friends, colleagues, and students.

Introduction

It is an honor and privilege to speak on behalf of Michael's self-proclaimed extended family - those of us who have come to know and love this extraordinary man as mentor, advisor, colleague, boss, and most important, as trusted friend.

There has been such sorrow, shock, disbelief and loss as we each heard, in our individual ways that Michael had passed - no longer with us in the way we had come to know and cherish. "What a dark day for the gifted" - was the echoing message that reverberated throughout the world's gifted community. And as Jenn Aldred, Michael's former grad student and long time friend, so poignantly said, "The grief

washes over me in waves."

I remember thinking, "Not Michael!" and then wondering, "Why Michael?" feeling numb and then lost - how would I manage without my touchstone - upon whom for almost 2 decades I had tested my ideas, fears, hopes, and dreams in my practice and research in gifted education? How would we, as a community, manage without Michael in our advocacy of best practice for our brightest bunnies? How would we manage without our friend?

In our grief, we turned to one another to make sense and through our conversations we remembered that nothing exists in isolation, community is everything, and we are part of a greater whole. We have laughed through the tears and cried through the laughter. "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

**We remembered that nothing exists in isolation,
community is everything,
and we are part of a greater whole.**

And so the healing process begins: the sadness of our loss for Michael's physical presence diminishes as our remembrances give cause to the celebration of his amazing life and legacy of service. He has been a gatherer of people, ironic given his introverted and deeply private nature. One of his greatest gifts to us has been that of community. Michael understood Wheatley's wisdom: "Relationships are all there is. Everything in the universe only exists because it is in relationship to everything else. We have to stop pretending that we are individuals who can go it alone." He may have been well ahead of his time.

Who Was Michael Pyryt?

From my frank perspective, Michael was one of the purest individuals I have known. As a friend and colleague said, "You know I could never get him to gossip!"

That he had a brilliant mind was clearly evident; that he led with empathy, intuition, and compassionate heart was equally transparent. What a powerful force for good he has been!

**That he led with empathy, intuition, and
compassionate heart was transparent.
What a powerful force for good he has been!**

He was a humanitarian who epitomized integrity and possessed great humility, a generosity of spirit, a wicked sense of humor, and most effective hand gestures to underscore an important point!

Message for Michael Pyryt. *A Significant Researcher, Friend, and Colleague.*

He was a “way show-er” and “truth finder” - a moral compass - and always sought his true north. There was simply no way to take him off track. As Margaret Wheatley notes, “When someone speaks the truth, we all become hopeful.” And Michael consistently brought us sustained hopefulness.

Michael’s authenticity as a person and educator was relentlessly steadfast - and the representation of his essence. He held a high degree of unity in his thinking, emotions, and activity. He was highly conscious and his autonomously developed hierarchy of values was his core of “being, knowing, and acting.” I believe he *was* the truth, which speaks to his unflinching trustworthiness. He was *always there* when you most needed him.

And as mentioned, it has been “Family First” for Michael. We remember him as one proud grandpa who would whisk out the latest pictures of his beautiful granddaughter, Brooke, in 30 seconds flat, his face beaming, or lead us to the *Brooke Gallery* on the computer in his office! The importance of family was also clearly evident in his professional life: his extensive international family in the field and his amazingly gifted family at the Centre. Ann says, “We knew he loved his family dearly. He believed in family, and I think the ‘Centre’ was his second family. Over the past week we have realized his family is even bigger than any of us might have known.”

Among his recent extended family is the Westmount Charter School Community who valued all that Michael knew and gave. As Superintendent Merv Kurtz recently noted, “Michael was a kind, gentle soul. His great wisdom was demonstratively depicted with humility.”

We thank his “real” family for having shared Michael with us through all these years.

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Conclusion

As we celebrate Michael’s life well lived, we honor his scholarly accomplishment and abundant success - a good thing. However, the other day I was struck by something I read by a long distance runner, who distinguished the difference between success and significance. He said, “When we cross a finish line, reach a goal, we feel successful. Success is a sense of personal achievement, a task well done. But beyond that, and more important, we achieve a sense of significance. Significance is the knowledge that we have made a contribution to others or had an impact in somebody’s life. Significance carries us beyond ourselves. Success is soon forgotten; signifi-

cance lasts forever. We are remembered because we’ve been significant, rather than successful.”

“Significance is the knowledge that we have made a contribution to others or had an impact in somebody’s life. Significance carries us beyond ourselves.”

And therein lays the difference. Michael’s significance... What a wonderful testimonial of all that is good. Jenn recently said, “It gives us comfort to be part of the circle that joins us to Michael’s core and his wise, gentle truth. It really was an honor, wasn’t it?”

Yes, it was. Not one of us will be able to match Michael’s footprints or fill the formidable void he leaves. However, as the community he has gathered and trusted, we can embrace the challenge he has left us: we can join hands, roll up our sleeves, raise the ceiling, raise a toast for Michael, focus on the higher common good, and in the wisdom of Pooh, remember that “We are smarter than we think, stronger than we seem, and braver than we feel.” I can see Michael smiling. He approves - I know it.

Not one of us will be able to match Michael’s footprints or fill the formidable void he leaves. However, as the community he has gathered and trusted, we can embrace the challenge he has left us.

In the words of Tagore, “Your voice, my friend, wanders in my heart, like the muffled sound of the sea among the listening pines.”

We love you, Michael; we honor the magnificence in you - always have, always will. God Bless.

We love you, Michael; we honor the magnificence in you—always have, always will.

A Tribute to Our Friend and Colleague, Michael Pyryt

Please join the AERA Research on Giftedness and Talent SIG in honoring the memory of our dear friend and colleague, Michael Pyryt. We will gather together on Tuesday, March 25, 2008, from 4:05 to 5:35 p.m. at the Hilton NY, Concourse D, Concourse Level.

A Tribute to Michael Pyryt

A Kind, Thoughtful Scholar

Some years ago as a fledgling doctoral student making only perhaps my second solo research presentation, I met Michael at an annual NAGC conference. Of all the people I encountered that year, he was one of less than a handful who made me feel as if I had right to be there – that I not only had completed my study well but that it had significance to our field. Thereafter, I invariably gravitated to him whenever our paths would cross, and a number of years later as NAGC President, I often consulted him behind the scenes about issues and direction. His advice was, like Michael, unequivocally clear, rooted in evidence, helpful to a fault, but unwavering in its empathy. Perhaps more importantly, Michael became my friend and not merely my colleague; he was compassionate, brilliant, and accepting. I have found that academe, like most of life's episodes, is replete with colleagues, but there are not many scholars who make themselves available as a true friend like Michael did for me. So long as I breathe, I will never forget his kind heart guided by his agile mind.

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Of course, I value research enormously, but my point about Michael is that he seemed naturally to place it into its proper place of importance – that being humans together on a planet that is in so many ways imperiled presents far many and probably more critical concerns than our research addresses. He always made me feel that our work is indeed important but never as important as the relationships that we forge along our respective life pathways. This demeanor set him apart markedly from the vast majority of our gifted research community sisters and brothers, yet it was this that made Michael so much a pivot in my own life. I shall not likely soon forget his kind and gentle – if not genteel – nature that for me shone out like a beacon amidst an environment that at times seems to be rather akin to myopia when one contemplates the larger world's issues. Without sensitivities like Michael actualized, our field seems far less human than it needs to be, for without the humanity of our field – gifted children and adults, our research would be wanton.

I am not available to attend AERA so I am hoping, albeit far into the future, that some appropriate activities honoring Michael, not merely for his work but for his essence as a human being, can be orchestrated in November at NAGC. I will certainly do whatever I can to facilitate. Let's face it fellow scholars; while our work may last years beyond our lifespan, there is more to each of us than our scholarship. It is what we do for others and how we treat them that is at least as important as our lists of publications and professional activities. While Michael of course had credentials in

both ways, as a scholar and as a down-to-earth person, it is the later set of accomplishments – those that touched the hearts of others – that will shine forever. Written publications in fact sustain one's name in print for eternity and the impact of those writings may also endure many years, yet the real essence of each of us is not in our work as much as in the nature and quality of the relationships we construct along the way. Frankly, in living the remainder of my life, I hope I do not ever forget the lessons of humility and kindness that Michael so well taught me.

Blessings, Michael; you are in a better place.

- Rick Olenchak



“My goal in life is to be as good a person as my dog already thinks I am.”

A Friend of Gifted Learners and Scholars

Michael was a wonderful person and professional who cared deeply about the development of gifted learners. He was a friend to me for many years, providing professional opportunities to work with his center in Calgary and to collaborate on curriculum development work with teachers in the area. We often chatted at NAGC and AERA about the field and where it was headed. He had an intellectual power that allowed him to broach new ideas for research and suggest methodological approaches to pursue them. For example, he was the first person to discuss the fact that no models in gifted education have been rigorously tested and to suggest what it would take to make that happen. He was always honest in his assessment of work, especially the methodological aspects. His critiques at AERA were a pleasure to behold! We shared a common love and respect for Julian Stanley and his efforts to systematize talent identification and development across this country and internationally. I remember how Michael was helpful in the details of Julian's service at NAGC Louisville and his lovely and thoughtful tribute. I thought his contributions (with Sal) to the self concept and social development literature in gifted education were quite unique and insightful and likely to continue to strengthen over time. I will always remember his love for Belvedere vodka, for data, and for attending Mass in each new city he visited. You will be missed, my friend—ave atque vale.

- Joyce VanTassel-Baska

Annual Meeting Highlights. New York City, March 24-28, 2008

Report from the Program Committee

Carol Tieso, *Program Chair*

We are all looking forward to AERA this year with a heavy heart. Michael put together a wonderful presentation for the business meeting and I think we have a very exciting and diverse program this year. So even though Michael won't be with us, we will celebrate his life and work throughout the conference.

We received a record number of 80 submissions this year, including several symposia. Since the paper sessions were limited to 90 minutes, we tried to set up paper sessions that allowed the presenters some time to actually discuss their work. We were able to accept 47 papers and 1 symposium for a total of 9 Paper Sessions (including the symposium), 2 Paper Discussion Sessions (formerly Roundtables), and 1 Business Meeting. AERA is still tinkering with the new configuration of SIG membership and number of submissions in assigning the number of sessions to each SIG.

The Business Meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 24 at 6:15 P.M. in the Hilton New York, Sutton Complex, on the 2nd floor. Karen Rogers, our Chair-Elect, will preside as we hear reports from the various officers and committee chairs. Then we will have the great honor of listening to a talk, entitled *Gifted Education Fifty Years after Sputnik*, by Dr. Abraham Tannenbaum, Professor Emeritus, Teachers College, Columbia University. We are also planning a tribute to Michael Pyryt, so please let me know if you're interested in speaking.

The symposium is scheduled for Friday, March 28, and is entitled, *The Aurora Project: Exploring the Entire Spectrum of Giftedness*. Elena Grigorenko will introduce papers by Robert J. Sternberg and Elena Grigorenko and lead a discussion of the project by participants with international perspectives.

I'd like to thank all of you who responded to our plea for help in reviewing proposals. We began with 34 reviewers and finished the program with 60 reviewers! That is a great tribute to the dedication of the membership of this organization. Finally, as program chair for this year's conference, I'd like to thank those of you who submitted, reviewed and/or volunteered as a chair or discussant. I would also like to express my sense of great sadness and loss at the untimely death of our SIG chair, and more importantly, our great friend, Michael Pyryt. He will be missed on many levels.

The following is a day-by-day highlight of our SIG program. Please plan to join us for as many sessions as possible.

Monday, March 24

2:15-2:55 p.m.: The Impact of Perceptions and Practices in the Identification and Retention of Gifted Students

6:15- 8:15 p.m.: Gifted SIG Business Meeting.

Don't miss the Gifted SIG Business Meeting on Monday, March 24 from 6:15-8:15 p.m. in Hilton New York/Sutton Complex, Sutton Center, 2nd floor

Tuesday, March 25

8:15-9:45 a.m.: Self-Concept and Gifted Learners Across Domains and Over Time

2:15-3:45 p.m.: Factors Influencing Gifted Students' Motivation and Achievement in Math and Reading

Wednesday, March 26

8:15-9:45 a.m.: Examining Research on Achievement for Gifted Learners

2:15-2:55 p.m.: Factors Influencing Creativity and Talent Development in Gifted Students

Thursday, March 27

10:35 a.m.-12:05 p.m.: Risk and Resiliency Factors in Giftedness and Talent Development

12:25-1:55 p.m.: Collaboration, Pedagogy, Grouping, and Achievement

2:15-3:45 p.m.: Diversity in Gifted Education and Development

Friday, March 28

8:15-9:45 a.m.: Preparing and Supporting Teachers of the Gifted

12:25-1:55 p.m.: **Symposium:** The Aurora Project: Exploring the Entire Spectrum of Giftedness



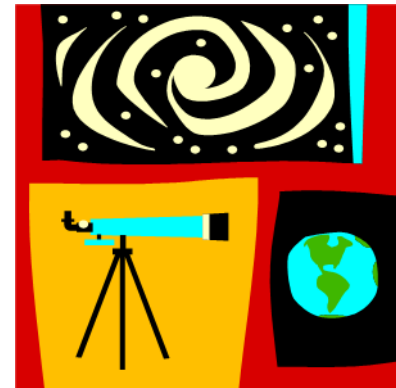
The AERA SIG: Research on Giftedness and Talent invites our members to an evening of business and pleasure in New York City!

Business Meeting Symposium:

Gifted Education 50 Years After Sputnik

Monday, March 24, 6:15-8:15

Hilton New York/Sutton Complex,
Sutton Center, 2nd Floor



Pleasure: La Bonne Soupe

(48 West 55th Street, between 5th and 6th Avenue -
about 2 blocks from the Hilton)

Immediately after the business meeting

Menu: salad, cheese fondue,
chocolate fondue

COST: \$32 per person,
payable at the door



Call for Submissions: Gifted Children e-journal

Dona Mathews, *Editor*

I'd like to encourage you to contribute to *Gifted Children*, the e-journal of the AERA ROGAT SIG. Now in its second year, *Gifted Children* provides a forum for thoughtful and informed dialogue about research in progress of interest to people working in gifted education and allied fields. Please send me articles, reviews, or reports on what's interesting, engaging, or

controversial in your work with high-ability learners and what you and your colleagues are learning or reading or thinking about investigating in your own research. For current and past issues, go to <http://www.aeragifted.org/>. Send your questions or submissions to Dona Mathews: donamathews@gmail.com



Studying Acceleration with National Datasets and Surveys: Some Suggestions, Some Results, and Our Experiences

David F. Lohman & Maureen A. Mar-ron, *Institute for Research & Policy on Acceleration, Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education & Talent Development, University of Iowa*

The Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration (IRPA) was established in 2006 at The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development at The University of Iowa through the support of the John Templeton Foundation. IRPA is unique in that its sole focus is the study of curricular acceleration for academically talented children. Academic acceleration is an educational intervention that moves high-ability students through an educational program at a rate faster or at an age younger than typical (Pressey, 1949). Acceleration helps match the level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum with students' intellectual abilities.

The founding of IRPA is a direct outcome of the success of the 2004 two-volume report by Nicholas Colangelo,

Susan Assouline, and Miraca Gross. The report, entitled *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* (available for free download at www.nationdeceived.org), synthesizes the 50 years of robust and consistent research on academic acceleration. The recurring refrain from this research is that both grade-based (e.g., grade skipping) and content-based (e.g., Advanced Placement classes) acceleration are effective, though underused, interventions in academic and social-emotional domains for high-ability students. Although grade-accelerated students generally out-perform their chronologically older classmates academically, both groups show approximately equal levels of social and emotional adjustment (see Assouline, et al., 2003; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Kulik & Kulik, 1992; 2004; Lipscomb, 2003; Saylor & Brookshire, 1993; Southern & Jones, 1991). Longer term, accelerants attain advanced degrees, produce scholarly works, and contribute professionally at rates well

above societal baselines (Lubinski et al., 2001, 2006).

It is fair to say that extant research has answered many basic questions about acceleration. At the most fundamental level, we know that acceleration is an effective intervention for high-ability students, particularly when the decision is carefully considered and supported by the school. At the same time, there are nuances to the research and unanswered questions about the factors that moderate success with the different forms of acceleration. Additionally, with the increase in public awareness of acceleration, changes in attitudes and policies need to be monitored. We report on two lines of research, secondary analyses of existing national datasets and nationally distributed surveys, that we hope will add to the existing knowledge of acceleration.

To continue reading about secondary analyses of national datasets and survey research from IRPA, please see the upcoming issue of Gifted Children, the SIG e-journal.

An Investigation of Innate Potential among Children of Various Ethnic Groups as Possible Criteria for Admission to Programs for the Gifted

Alexinia Y. Baldwin, *University of Connecticut*

Identifying able learners from various ethnic/racial groups continues to be a concern among educators. Authors such as Jensen (1998) have suggested that some of the differences found regularly might be related to the heritability factor found in various ethnic groups. Much of Jensen's later work has been centered on the use of the speed of processing button box which tested response and movement times.

As early as 1977, Baldwin wrote that tests can under predict the potential ability of children from an African American ethnic background.

Her case study of 24 students who were selected for the first gifted class for African American students in this southern town, showed how inadequate the standardized tests were in assessing the potential shown by these students who were given the opportunity to explore new ideas in a stimulating environment and a chance to interact with students of similar abilities.

The use of non-verbal testing tools has been recommended as a way to eliminate the biases that can occur from poor environments, different language skills, and educational and environmental situations that were depressed. There has been some success

in these measures in assessing the potential for students of color but in order to recommend additional options, base line data on the processes of this study are needed in order to supplement the findings of others in this area e.g. (Ford, 1998; Renzulli, et.al., 2000).

The research noted in this article included students from two schools grades 4, 5, and 6 in two different communities. The first study (n=51) and the second study (n=116) used two non-verbal techniques; the Ravens Standard Progressive Matrix (RSPM) and the Jensen Button Box (JBB) which tested response (*cont'd p. 8*)

Significant Research: Innate Potential among Gifted Children of Various Ethnic Groups, cont'd

(cont'd from p. 7)

and movement times (to 0.001 second) to a standardized stimulus. The battery of standardized tests used by both schools, notably, Iowa Test Basic Skills (ITBS), Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT) and Otis Lennon IQ test (OLIQ) were included in the analysis of data.

Tests can under predict the potential ability of children from an African American ethnic background.

Study Procedures

This two-part study was conducted in a northeastern inner city and a suburban community. The questions that were to be answered were:

- Are there positive correlations between the selected IQ and achievement test scores used in these school districts and the scores on the RSPM and JBB?
- Are there any differences and similarities in the scores achieved by children selected or not selected for the school's "gifted" class?
- Are there any significant positive correlations between the RSPM and the speed of processing information by means of the JBB derived from its Response and Movement times?
- What differences in the scores on RSPM and JBB, were there among the various ethnic groups?

Population. The population of the first study was 51 students from Grades 4, 5, and 6 of a school in a northeastern city with students from predominantly Black and Hispanic homes which were economically depressed. The second study was of 134 students again of Grades 4, 5, and 6, of whom 116 completed all measures in the study. These students came from a northeastern suburban school which had a population representative of the

local middle class community. The students were mainly Caucasian with a smaller percentage of Black students and a very small proportion of Asian, Hispanic and other students.

Instruments. Raven's Standard Progressive Matrix (RSPM) was given to all students of the study. The test was administered using the group protocol and scored according to guidelines of the test manual. This instrument is widely used as a non-verbal screening measure of intellectual ability. The RSPM was designed to cover the widest possible range of mental ability and to be equally useful with persons of all ages (6yr-adult).

The identification and assessment instruments used in the schools of these districts included the ITBS composite score; the CAT - verbal, non-verbal and qualitative; and the OLIQ test. These tests were administered during the spring of each school year.

The Response/Movement Time Button Box (JBB) was used as another non-verbal test of intellectual skills. Wilhelm Wundt (cited in Jensen, 1986), used reaction time as "the principal technique for the objective analysis, or decomposition, of mental activity, identifying, and measuring in real time, such processes as perception, apperception, cognition, association, discrimination, choice, and judgment" (p.53). The methodological and statistical techniques used in the Response Time (JBBRT) for this study are classified under the Hick Reaction-Time paradigm. The Response time (RT) is the person's response latency to the onset of a single stimulus or signal. The Movement Time (MT) is the person's response latency between recognition and execution of the task. The signals can have different levels of challenge but in this study the same complexity was used, notably the Hick Paradigm using the most discrepant of three sources of information. The task is in a repeated battery of ten trials. The cli-

ent's responses to the signals are timed (0.001 seconds) and recorded automatically by computer. It is programmed to produce both means and SD of both response and movement times.

The students in both populations were given the JBB individually, whereas the RSPM was given in a group format.

Findings

The data collected showed that there were significant positive correlations between the RSPM, the Otis IQ test, the CAT, and the RSPM. Although these correlations were not high, they were within the range consistently reported in the literature. It was evidence of common areas being assessed. There were significant negative correlations between the speed of processing (JBBRT) using the "Hick Odd Man Out," and all other cognitive tests, notably the ITBS, the RSPM, the OIQ test, the CAT, and the RSPM. The JBBMT measures did not correlate significantly with these cognitive tests.

In the suburban school, the median of the reaction time (JBBRT) of the Caucasian students was significantly lower than that of the Black students. The scores of the Black students were spread much more widely than those of the Caucasian children. Whereas there were Black students with overall 'fast' scores, the largest percentage of students with the slower scores were Black.

In this study, there were more Black than Caucasian students in lower economic status homes. Given the known relationship of low socioeconomic status (SES) to intellectual achievement, it is expected that SES would have contributed to the larger and positively skewed spread of scores of Black students.

Gifted. In the second study (N=116) the school's policy of selecting children for gifted classes was based on achievement on the school curriculum

(cont'd on p. 9)

SIGNificant Research: Innate Potential among Gifted Children of Various Ethnic Groups, cont'd

(cont'd from p. 9)

and teachers' opinion of suitability.

Gifted students who had been selected for programs offered in the school were included in both portions of this study. In the first study ($n=51$), students were selected for the GT program based on achievement tests scores and recommendations of teachers. Additionally, the students selected for the school's GT program were compared to the non-selected students.

On the basis of standardized scores, there was a significant overlap between the scores of students selected or not selected for the school's gifted classes. There were 7 students from minority homes and 2 White students who had not been selected for the school's gifted program but who showed potential abilities worthy of being considered for gifted programs i.e. IQs in the top 5%. It is interesting to note that there were a few students in the GT program who would not have been selected on the bases of their scores on the RSPM and the JBB.

With regard to the findings of the study's own testing, RSPM and JBB, and those of the school's, ITBS, CAT, OLIQ, the various measures of intellectual ability inter-correlated positively and significantly with the exception of the JBB data which, being speed, correlated negatively with the other cognitive measures.

While the distributions overlapped significantly, the results indicated higher mean scores for Caucasian students than those students of ethnic or racial background. Differences were found between the children selected for the school's GT program and those who would have been selected on the basis of standardized scores. Studies are needed to address the school placement in terms of student qualifications. Perhaps being in the top 5% of those deemed suitable by the teacher, by school achievement and by standardized tests in intellectual potential,

should all be included and outcomes investigated. Additional studies should look at student, parent, and teacher attitudes towards the affects of environment.

Conclusion

These two studies were an attempt to seek more definitive information on the use of non-verbal assessment tools and to analyze the consequence of the singular use of achievement test scores in the selection process for inclusion in classes for the gifted. From the data of this study, the RSPM appears to be a valid instrument to use in the selection process. Data from the scores on the JBB provide additional information that can be used to supplement assessment processes. Speed of processing was strong among the minority students, but additional research is needed to determine the role that speed of processing plays in the display of potential high levels of intellectual ability. The JBB is a research tool that can help establish baseline data that can assist in developing significant recommendations regarding the emphasis placed on the use of either non-verbal or achievement test data in the placement of students in classes for the gifted.

As could be expected, the Caucasian students of the suburban community scored higher in the achievement tests than the minority students from the inner city. A more in-depth analysis of the relationship of the scores of the minority students of this suburban community and those of the Caucasian students would be worthwhile in the discussion of external discrepancies that affect the inclusion of minorities in programs for the gifted.

It is important that future studies using these techniques include data regarding the parent teachers, and school environment as intervening variables. This relatively small study is a step toward verifying misconceptions

regarding the validity of the use of various methods of assessment.

The Jensen Button Box is a research tool that can help establish baseline data that can assist in developing significant recommendations regarding the emphasis placed on the use of either non-verbal or achievement test data in the placement of students in classes for the gifted.

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Developing Talent in Conducting Gifted Education Research

Interview with Dr. Joyce VanTassel-Baska, conducted by Bronwyn MacFarlane, *College of William & Mary*

“You can do those things,” were the empowering and impacting words I heard during my first conversation with Dr. Joyce VanTassel-Baska in Salt Lake City, Utah at the 2004 National Association for Gifted Children annual conference. After hearing Dr. VanTassel-Baska speak about curriculum for gifted learners during a panel presentation, I approached the NAGC president-elect and during the course of our conversation described some ideas I hoped to work on regarding teaching high ability students. Little did I know that her affirmation would lead to a personal interview 3 years later about her specific advice in developing talent for conducting research in issues and practices relevant to gifted education.

“You can do those things.”

That fateful day as I attended the national conference alone, her response of interest and assuredness that my ideas were meritorious ones increased my confidence in taking new and specific steps in expanding my educational career. Indeed within less than 10 months I had left my tenured teaching position and moved across the country to study under Dr. VanTassel-Baska as a doctoral student in the William and Mary educational leadership program focused on gifted administration. During my time as a developing researcher, I have reflected frequently on my individual professional growth as well as given witness to the development of research talents in fellow doctoral student colleagues. As research assistant to Dr. VanTassel-Baska, I have had exceptional opportunities to be involved with sophisticated projects

that have stretched my scope of understanding and insight. In confluence with discussions of critical issues and practices in developing the gifts and talents of high ability students, Dr. VanTassel-Baska graciously gave time for this interview to share her views to researchers shaping their careers.

BM: What advice would you give to new researchers in the field of gifted education?

JVTB: My first piece of advice would be to establish a sound agenda and program of research. The classical approach to building a research agenda is to build from the dissertation. That is one way of ensuring that a research program gets off the ground. On the other hand, there are many off shoots of dissertations that students may pursue as well in establishing a strong agenda. For example, a dissertation may be a quasi-experimental design, testing a new intervention with low income learners. Such a study may lead to a program of research that continues to test innovative practices in schools. It also may lead to a research agenda that focuses primarily on low income promising learners and emphasizes the tailoring of programs and services specifically for those students. Such a dissertation could also lead to a more in-depth emphasis on the social and psychological factors that impact such learners over time. My point is that new researchers need to think carefully about the confluence of interests, skills, and feasibility in conducting certain types of research studies and assess the possibility of doing such research over a ten year period.

A second piece of advice I would give relates to the “end game” for new researchers; that is, publication in peer-reviewed journals. Too often young researchers get stymied by early stages of research and don’t think through to the final product. It is very important to plan out publication

strategies, a submission timeline, and a revision schedule in order to ensure that your research has an outlet that is appropriate for your work and meets tenure guidelines at your institution.

Thirdly, all new researchers should plan to attend AERA annually to become socialized to the world of educational research and its several manifestations. AERA is also a wonderful place to network with people with similar research interests, to learn about the larger world of education, and to update methodological skills.

All new researchers should plan to attend AERA annually....

Finally, many new researchers in the field of gifted education may face lonely careers at institutions of higher education unless they are able to form a coterie of collaborators, people who share some common interest yet bring different perspectives and skills to a research agenda. One way to establish such a group is to create a Center that deliberately draws together faculty, staff, and students in a common research enterprise. This approach is more long lasting than brown bags and occasional faculty discussions of research agendas. It is also much more satisfying and rewarding on the road to tenure.

BM: How do you go about making decisions about what types of studies to conduct?

JVTB: If by type of study you mean the subject matter of research, always study issues that you are interested in and know something about to begin with. For example, if you are a K-12 person trying to move into higher education, think about the areas you know best in that venue (e.g. the subject matter you taught, the grade level students you

worked with, the school district systems that you came to understand). Link those basic understandings to key problems in your field and decide which of those problems you have the greatest interest in addressing through a research agenda.

If your question is more related to the methodological side of conducting research, then I would advise using methodologies with which you are familiar, based on your doctoral work and applied studies during that time. While learning new methodologies can be exciting, you must be sure to get enough practice effect in one approach to feel comfortable applying it to new studies.

BM: What are the top *three* fundamental habits or skills important for new researchers in gifted education?

JVTB: I would say the first one is knowing a topic deeply and well, especially the research literature on that topic and being able to articulate that understanding. Ironically, in order to study something for a research project, you need to have deep knowledge of that subject before you even know the right questions to ask for posing a research study. In order to develop deep knowledge in an area, researchers must be curious and continue to ask probing questions about what they don't know.

Researchers must be curious and continue to ask probing questions about what they don't know.

Second, be familiar and able to use at least two approaches to conducting research. It is good to have a quantitative design well developed but also to have skills in interview protocols. It is more important to know fewer methodological tricks and know them well than it is to have a surface knowledge of many without sufficient interplay with actual conducted research.

Third, new researchers in gifted education have to develop persistence—to understand they will be turned down for research studies and even publication. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to conduct applied research in schools, given IRB requirements and school-based restrictions. It is also more challenging to get published in any field as journal standards continue to rise. It is typical to be asked to make extensive revisions of work submitted. Only young researchers with tough skins and creative ways of dealing with such obstacles are likely to be successful.

BM: What can new researchers in gifted education do in cultivating and continuing to strengthen the bridge between educational researchers and school-based practitioners?

JVTB: Most of my career I have thought of myself as a translator between higher education and the world of K-12 because I have spent relatively equal parts of my career in each setting. However, the longer I am in higher education, the more I feel that the gulf between researchers and practitioners has widened and deepened due to prejudices on both sides. The world of K-12 may be characterized as in the moment, spontaneous, and viewed as chaotic from the outside in respect to the dynamics of teaching and learning. The world of research in higher education is orderly, pre-planned, and demands attention to structure and detail. It is little wonder that these worlds collide in the conduct of educational research. Yet it is critical that lines of communication between the two worlds stay open and easy. I believe more research-oriented dissemination conferences and publications aimed at practitioner audiences will help alleviate these problems. More collaborative efforts between higher education and K-12 will also promote greater understanding of the issues on both sides. Finally, the attitudes of researchers and practitioners need to be open to each others' abilities, skills, and values.

Most of my career I have thought of myself as a translator between higher education and the world of K-12...

One of the world's leading experts on gifted education, Dr. Joyce VanTassel-Baska is the Jody and Layton Smith Professor of Education and Executive Director of the Center for Gifted Education at The College of William and Mary in Virginia, where she has developed a graduate program and a research and development center in gifted education. A highly sought after consultant on gifted education, she has published widely, including 22 books and over 500 refereed journal articles, book chapters, and scholarly reports. Dr. VanTassel-Baska has received numerous awards for her work on behalf of expanding what we know about educating gifted students. Her major research interests are on the talent development process and effective curricular interventions with the gifted.

At the core of all her activities, Dr. VanTassel-Baska describes herself as a teacher with foundations in educational practitioner experience. She initiated and directed the Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University. She has also served as the state director of gifted programs for Illinois, as a regional director of a gifted service center in the Chicago area, as coordinator of gifted programs for the Toledo, Ohio public school system, and as a teacher of gifted high school students in English and Latin. Dr. VanTassel-Baska has advised graduate students in developing their research skills over the past 20 years as Executive Director of the William and Mary Center for Gifted Education.



It's All in How You Look at It

Erin Morris Miller, *James Madison University*

As one initially gets to know a fellow colleague or researcher and you begin to discuss your interests, one of the first things that is shared is one's perspective on inquiry: are you a quantitative person or a qualitative person? (For those who say you are mixed methods, admit it, you have a preference!) We tend to sort ourselves even as graduate students into one of two camps. And although there are certainly distinct philosophical underpinnings to each method, few people would be willing to dismiss one or other as useless in understanding life. Thinking about this dichotomy brings to mind the story of the inoperable tumor that cannot be eradicated with a single beam of radiation but can be destroyed with several beams aimed from different directions, which converge at the disease. It is a story that teaches not only about looking for solutions outside the box, but also about the power of different perspectives.

Take for instance the topic of teachers' implicit theories of giftedness. An implicit theory of giftedness is a personal conception of giftedness that resides in a person's mind. These models are formed through the sum of a person's experiences. The study of implicit theories of giftedness lends itself easily to qualitative research. If you want to know what people believe, then listen carefully to them and observe their actions. Qualitative research has provided us with lists of characteristics that teachers use when describing gifted children. The results of these studies indicate that teachers generally seemed to be either unaware of the traits associated with broader and more inclusive definitions of giftedness, and/or were unable to recognize how these traits are manifested, or did not focus on these kinds of traits as indicators of giftedness (Campbell & Verna, 1998; Hun-

saker, 1994; Peterson & Margolin, 1997; Rohrer, 1995; Singer, Houtz & Rosenfield, 1992). These results support the idea that teachers' implicit conceptions of giftedness may be hindering their ability to see diverse expressions of talent.

But an understanding of teachers' beliefs (and the implications of those beliefs when trying to facilitate teachers in their recognition of talents of diverse students) is too important to rely on a single research approach. Taking a quantitative approach can help us understand implicit theories as well. Giftedness can also be thought of as a mentally constructed educational and social category. One way to study category formation is to take advantage of methods developed by cognitive psychologists as they seek to model these phenomena. In cognitive psychology research, concepts are thought of as mental representations that form groups of equivalent things to create categories. Researchers have sought to understand how people form these concepts and the structure and mechanisms that determine categories (e.g., Ahn, 1998; Kruchke, 1992; Murphy & Medin, 1985; Nosofsky, 1989). By studying how categorization occurs on a cognitive level, we may find better ways of understanding what the category "gifted" means to others and how to operationalize it for research purposes.

But an understanding of teachers' beliefs...is too important to rely on a single research approach.

This method can supplement qualitative studies because it allows for a detailed analysis of the relationships among the characteristics. An understanding of these relationships seems to be essential to understanding the struc-

ture of teachers' theories. One can gather information regarding how students may vary in their manifestation of the characteristics and the possible correlations among these characteristics. Information about student variability and the relationships among characteristics contributes to the coherence of a theory (Murphy & Medin, 1985). Information about the reasoning behind the characteristics that teachers believe to be important would help to clarify the nature of teachers' theories of giftedness. (For a detailed analysis of the application of categorization research to the understanding of giftedness see Miller, 2005).

I adapted methods from cognitive psychology in my study primary school teachers' beliefs about giftedness (Miller, 2008). Teachers created quantitatively analyzable graphic representations of their beliefs about giftedness and responded to a survey designed to tap the strength or importance of different characteristics that could be part of an individual's conception of giftedness. The results of this study supported previous studies of teachers' beliefs in that the teachers in this study focused on traditional characteristics of giftedness and did not tend to include characteristics associated with diverse gifted students in their theories. The most often included and strongest traits included: ability to see patterns, relationships, connections; ability to generate many imaginative/original ideas; asking lots of questions/being inquisitive; ability to use logic to solve problems; enjoying discovery; and having a broad range of knowledge. Traits such as having a balance between academic and social endeavors, respecting tradition, making a contribution to his/her neighborhood/community, and having non-book knowledge/being streetwise were not important factors in the teachers' conceptions. (*cont'd on p. 13*)

SIGNificant Research Methodology: It's All in How You Look at It, cont'd

(continued from p. 12)

However there were unique results as well. Comparisons were made between teachers who had completed 12 hours or more of university level training in gifted education and those who had not. There were no significant differences between the groups in their conceptions of giftedness. However, there was also little consistency among the teachers in their graphic representations of their implicit theories even though they all used a similar set of characteristics, suggesting that all elementary classroom teachers do not define common characteristics of giftedness in the same way. This lack of consistency is interesting. Past research seemed to suggest that teachers were similar in their beliefs because they used the same kinds of words in their descriptions and discussions of gifted students. But statistical analyses of graphic representations of their beliefs suggest that teachers' beliefs may be more idiosyncratic than previously thought.

Teachers beliefs may be more idiosyncratic than previously thought.

This is but one example of the potential of exploring different research methods and perspectives and possibly

looking outside of the educational field for inspiration when designing research. The story of the innovative cure for the inoperative tumor is often told to demonstrate the creative gifted mind. We should aspire to be no less open-minded as we study giftedness.

We should aspire to be no less open-minded as we study giftedness.

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