

Applying Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration Within the Classroom

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This article will enlighten educators about the potential of Kazimierz Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration (TPD). I will endeavor to impart its practicality and how it may be of significance in their teaching, particularly with gifted students. Due to the confines of this article, readers unfamiliar with Dabrowski's TPD (Dabrowski 1972; Dabrowski and Piechowski 1977; Piechowski 1975) are referred to articles by Tillier and Mendaglio in this issue for a more comprehensive explanation of the theory's main components. Within this article, however, over-excitabilities (OE), levels of development and dynamisms will be incorporated in the context of teaching. Therefore, educators should be enabled to better understand Dabrowski's TPD, and to relate and appreciate the insights pertinent to teaching that his theory has disclosed for me. My interpretation of Dabrowski's complex theory of personality development will be interspersed with and reflected in anecdotes of former students. Entailed in this article is an overview of developmental potential, its implications with regard to the gifted, its application to teaching and its personal relevance. The article concludes with some thought-provoking questions to pursue.

Developmental Potential

According to Tillier (2000) and others, Dabrowski's complex theory of personality development involves three phases: early socialization (initial, lower-level integrations based on instinct and socialization); re-organization (series of disintegrations and re-integrations); and transformation (higher secondary integration based on one's own critically developed values and personality ideal). The interplay of three factors—developmental potential, influence of social milieu, and autonomous or self-determining factors—is a prerequisite for the developmental process. The first factor refers to biological impulses, the second to adherence to social convention without critical thought and the third to the strong drive toward autonomous growth derived from conscious critical thought.

Growth, however, depends on both the presence and strength of hereditary or biological traits that Dabrowski (1972) calls developmental potential. Developmental potential is defined as "the constitutional endowment which determines the character and the extent of mental growth possible for a given individual" (p. 293). Dabrowski and Piechowski (1977) proposed that advanced development inevitably involves a dismantling of existing

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psychological structures to construct higher, more sophisticated structures. The person's emotional makeup and intellectual capacity will determine the extent of possible development. It is the inner conflict that activates the powerful force and drive to compel the person toward higher levels of functioning. The inborn emotional, intellectual and imaginal OE eventually lead to the development of value structures that guide development (Silverman 1993).

Each of the five levels of hierarchical and multidimensional development are characterized by distinguishable features. Pyryt and Mendaglio (1993) describe the gradual transformation from the lowest to the highest level of personality development as follows: from external to internal locus of control, from impulsiveness to reflectiveness, from superficial sociability to genuine compassion, from concerns with social norms to those of ideal norms, from moral relativism to adoption of universal principles and from self-seeking love to all-embracing love. In other words, development is evident in one's advancement toward a sense of autonomy by providing the person with a sense of control over one's lower instincts and the social environment. Tillier (2000) refers to the lower levels of functioning (primitive syntony) as levels of automatism, impulsiveness, stereotype, egocentrism and absence or minimal degree of consciousness, whereas higher levels of functioning are characterized by distinct consciousness, inner psychic transformation, autonomy and creativity.

Implications for the Gifted

The gifted population, according to Dabrowski, will disproportionately exhibit strong OE and is therefore prone to the disintegrative process. Hence, teachers, counsellors, parents and significant others have the potential to tailor and apply knowledge of TPD to support the person's process of personality growth. It must first be determined whether the crisis being experienced

by the person is generated from within or is due to external sources. That is, there is a need to examine the rationale behind the person's behavior and emotions because TPD is only applicable to those possessing an empathetic capacity.

If disintegration fits into a developmental context, Dabrowski advocated educating the person in the theory so that he or she can develop insight and understand the context within which to appreciate one's intense emotions, needs, situation, experiences and the plan of development. Despite our inability to ease or minimize the experience of OE and the disintegrative process, we can provide a supportive and encouraging environment, especially through the height of a person's developmental crises. The goal, ultimately, is to equip the person with the faculties to be one's own best therapist.

Implications for Teaching

Prior to my exposure to Dabrowski's TPD, the premise for my teaching conduct and practices were influenced by the following personal beliefs:

- Everyone needs and wants to be heard, understood and accepted.
- Self-awareness and metacognition will benefit and best serve the student.
- Instilling responsibility and initiative helps achieve locus of control and, conversely, fostering locus of control encourages responsibility and initiative.
- Actions speak louder than words; remember, students are astute at assessing a teacher's sincerity and credibility.

Therefore, I have consistently and earnestly endeavored to really understand my students, their idiosyncrasies and their personal backgrounds. By acknowledging and appreciating students' emotional states, I have been enabled to work more effectively with them. My previous observation-formulated hypotheses of student behavior now, reassuringly, have a theoretical foundation or basis with Dabrowski's TPD.

Assuming that personality development is influenced by the OE and autonomous inner forces (PD = OE + autonomous forces/dynamisms), knowing any part of the equation may provide insight into its respective component. That is, familiarity with what is encompassed within each aspect of Dabrowski's theory enables teachers to effectively engage their comprehensive appreciation. For practicality, the application and relevance of Dabrowski's TPD to teaching will, therefore, be explained in terms of positive disintegration levels incorporating the respective dynamisms and the OE.

In relating Dabrowski's TPD to teaching, I will present anecdotal descriptions of former students exemplifying characteristics proposed by his theory. People are complex because of the unique composition of OE of varying degrees and activation of dynamisms. Nevertheless, selected students will be presented under the five distinguished levels of personality development, incorporating the respective dynamisms and OE. An explanation of the components of Dabrowski's TPD in the context of teaching and the school environment, suggestions for the teacher and incorporation within the classroom environment, and anecdotal descriptions of former students who exemplify some of the aforementioned aspects of Dabrowski's theory of personality development will follow accordingly.

It should be noted that the student behaviors were categorized according to the observation at the time. With optimal nurturing and environmental conditions, however, the students referred to in the following may have replaced structures of lower levels with higher levels of development. That is, there may have been a progression in phases, as previously mentioned—from early socialization to reorganization, or from reorganization to transformation. Furthermore, it was not my intention to merely stereotype former students by simply placing them into one of the levels of personality development.

Before proceeding any further, however, the following assertions and/or assumptions must be emphasized and considered:

- All people possess varying degrees and combinations of OE, but OE are more heightened and pronounced in the gifted (Dabrowski and Piechowski 1977).
- People may experience various levels of development in different dimensions or OE simultaneously (Dabrowski and Piechowski 1977).
- With heredity being a fixed factor, providing an optimal nurturing environment and stimulation is essential in maximizing each person's potential (Dabrowski and Piechowski 1977).
- Living in a social and interdependent society, students must be prepared to exercise constructive decision-making skills so that they conduct themselves in a manner that betters society and enhances the individual.
- If the goal of education is to achieve the highest level of development, perhaps more attention to the affective domain is warranted as pointed out by Pyryt and Mendaglio (1993) rather than to prioritizing the cognitive aspect as currently practised.

Just as it is important to match client to counsellor, as asserted by Mendaglio (1994), it is important to appropriately match student to teacher. Given the perceptiveness of gifted students, they will inevitably challenge the teacher's credibility and authority—overtly or inadvertently. Therefore, confidence in the teacher is necessary for the student to be receptive to the teacher's suggestions, instruction and so forth. For example, a teacher functioning as a "level one robopath" (Bertalanffy 1967 and Yablonsky 1972 in Tillier 1998) will not be able to relate to or effectively support students enduring level three emotional turbulence. A teacher who has personally experienced and weathered the inner conflicts and existential struggles, who is hence operating at a higher level of development, will be more

sensitive and competent in identifying and supporting students enduring inner turmoil. The perceptive student will better accept and trust the empathic, introspective and reassuring teacher in the seemingly unbearable disintegrative process. On the other hand, students get frustrated with and lack respect for teachers whom they can easily manipulate and, consequently, they lack confidence in such teachers' judgement.

OE with Respect to Teaching

From five channels through which Dabrowski suggested that people perceive and/or experience the world, the combination of strong emotional, imaginal and intellectual OE renders heightened experiences (as depicted graphically by Pyryt and Mendaglio 1993). Although suggestions for each OE are presented separately, it is the unique composition of the various OE with which the teacher must consider and contend. Each of the five OEs will be exemplified with a personal account in reference to or pertinent to teaching.

Psychomotor

Because of some students' extreme excess of physical energy, the provision of activities incorporating or accommodating lots of movement and expenditure of physical energy will prove less frustrating for both the student and the teacher. Teachers are cautioned from readily labeling such behaviors as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder).

My incessant need to move and to keep busy is often met with responses such as "I wish I had half your energy. It wears me out just watching and listening to you!" As hiking or some form of solitary physical activity is a catalyst for helping me generate ideas, organize thoughts or compose essays, I can therefore relate to the students who experience difficulty remaining still while thinking or working.

Sensual

With students with heightened visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and taste receptors, structuring learning tasks eliciting the use of the senses will prove pleasurable and satisfying for both the student and the teacher. The student will probably be more receptive and inclined to respond and will be reassured by more frequent affection, such as hugs and pats.

Because of my own hypersensitivity to environmental factors, I am conscious of providing a cheerful and peacefully soothing yet stimulating and sensually appealing environment. From personal experience, I encourage and attempt to instill within my students the exercise of appropriate self-control and necessary self-restraint. Regardless of my concerted effort to restrain myself in a movie theatre, while watching television or while witnessing an accident or an event, I still get caught up in the moment. For example, I am unable to breathe until the victim surfaces from the water. Therefore, how can I refrain from being hypocritical if I reprimand students for evoked spontaneous reactions?

Intellectual

Activities fostering self-awareness and acquaintance with learning styles, strategies and preferences will prove enlightening to students interested in self-understanding. The teacher should encourage and provide opportunities for these students to best communicate their knowledge, adhering to considerations such as social acceptability and desirability.

My own metacognition, self-awareness and increasing self-understanding have been assets in relating my appreciation for what students may be experiencing. The introspection has also enabled me to share with the appreciative parents the disintegrative process that their child is undergoing and how they may insightfully

encourage and support their child—notwithstanding their inability to actually minimize the emotional experience. Perfectionism, self-criticism and meeting others and one's own expectations are prime examples of issues I frequently address with students and parents.

Imaginational

Teachers can best benefit the student with an aptitude for visualization and role play by channeling creativity toward something personally enriching for the student and, ultimately, productive and beneficial to society.

I have had the fortunate opportunity to unleash my creativity and vivid imagination in the units I develop and implement with my students. My success is largely due to being able to envision how my students will respond to the meaningfully structured simulations and experiential learning activities and to the inherent enthusiasm that the students can sense within me. One of my most vivid recollections of significant learning as a student was when each of my classmates and I assumed the roles of various significant figures during the time of Canada's confederation and simulated the enactment of the Charlottetown Conference.

Emotional

Disregarding a student's overwhelming feelings and responding by saying, "You shouldn't feel like that!" are more frustrating than reassuring. Regardless of others' good intentions, a person cannot deny the reality of his or her emotions. Some students are extremely sensitive to their relationship with others and to the universe; therefore, the teacher can best help by encouraging constructive ways in which to consider, approach and handle the intense feelings experienced.

My emotional hypersensitivity, above all else, pervades every aspect of my life.

That is, everything is laden with emotion or connotes an associated feeling. I was repeatedly criticized for being too sensitive or overly sensitive when I was young. However, being emotionally sensitive and attuned has served me particularly well in my teaching capacities. Although my students may not specifically remember what I have taught them, they will certainly remember how I have treated them. In an adult relationship one may continually try harder because the individual does not feel as if the other hears him or her. Likewise, students need to feel that their emotional needs are being addressed. Teachers need to look deeper into and beyond what the students are saying. I attempt to determine whether the inability to articulate what they are thinking and feeling is due to lack of vocabulary, a desire to deliberately avoid or obscure or ignorance. Though I may not be able to solve or to ease the student's particular problem or conflict, just being able to share with and to confide in someone who understands seems to help lighten the burden. As one who becomes so emotionally overwhelmed at times for no particular reason, I can appreciate the need for a good "emotional purge" with someone who is a good listener and who understands.

Levels of Development Exemplified with Anecdotal Descriptions of Students

Level One (Primary Integration)

Although Dabrowski's research indicates that gifted persons are generally more advanced in their level of personality development, there are those who are not. This is disconcerting and of great concern because high intellectual capacity combined with a lack of morals or conscience can cause ruthless actions and consequences. A prime historical example is the creation of the atomic bomb by such a person (Rankel 1996).

Because of the interdependence of society, we citizens must learn to conduct ourselves according to social norms aimed at and for the betterment of society. Therefore, though psychopaths lack a conscience, they must be told that inappropriate behavior will not be condoned. Whether they lack remorse or not, natural and stipulated consequences must be enforced. Because of the lack of remorse in psychopaths, considered by Dabrowski (1964) and Tillier (1998) to be the lowest level of development, the teacher may find it necessary to ensure other students' safety by distancing them from the potentially harmful student. It is necessary, however, to reinforce that the negative behaviors displayed are inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

The "blissfully blind" or "robopaths" need to be exposed to alternatives and constructive decision-making processes and skills. Robopaths—at the next lowest level of development (Bertalanffy 1967 and Yablonsky 1972, in Tillier 1998)—must be exposed to different perspectives, because they tend to follow blindly or accordingly. Therefore, they must be guided through the process of considering and exploring other alternatives and questioning critically.

As indicated by Tillier (2000), Piechowski and Dabrowski differed in opinion as to the level at which the average person functions. Dabrowski's assertion that 65 percent of the population exists at the upper level of primary integration was considered too pessimistic by Piechowski, who subdivided level two and contended that the majority of the population operated at the lower level of unilevel disintegration.

Of the many students whom I have taught over the past 10 years, Jason perplexed me the most. That is, I had considerably greater difficulty comprehending the motivation for his behavior, though it was merely because I subconsciously did not want to admit or accept his exhibition of sociopathic tendencies or his lack of

remorse or conscience. Perhaps the difficulty was more in attempting to find an acceptable reason for his deviant misconduct and reprehensible attitude. Not surprisingly, his parents are unprepared when complimentary comments regarding Jason are given as they are rather accustomed to being defensive from the history of negative criticism regarding their child's social ineptness and frequent misbehavior. Nevertheless, they were willing to support initiatives aimed at altering his conduct.

I have a vivid recollection of an incident that occurred near the end of recess. Without provocation or prior incident, Jason picked up a handful of debris and tossed it into some children's faces. When the teacher on outdoor supervision went to address this matter with Jason among the students waiting patiently to enter the school, Jason responded to the teacher's request for clarification as to what happened by reaching down for another handful of dirt and tossing it into the teacher's face. When this matter was brought to the attention of the administration and his parents, he was still unable to explain his actions—beyond that he merely felt the urge to do it—and again at the teacher!

That he "just felt like doing it" accompanied by an almost nonchalant sneer was a rather common and standard response to having his misbehavior addressed. Seemingly unrepentant for neglecting his responsibility or ownership for his actions, he was rather more disturbed because he got caught. The extrinsic rewards appeared relatively ineffective and provided little incentive because the externally imposed consequences failed to elicit any internal motivation.

He often secluded himself somewhere within the classroom and shredded up sheets of paper into minute pieces around him as if he were nesting. As if Jason were oblivious to his classmates assembling

quickly at the meeting corner for discussion or instruction, he would grab a carpet remnant and attempt to fly back and forth across the room.

His greatest pleasures are achieving a self-initiated challenge, doing mathematical tasks and eating. Although Jason is emotionally reticent about most things, he does show tenderness toward babies. He also prefers the company of and is more easily befriended by girls.

The Jekyll and Hyde personality observed is confounding because in the middle of being totally absorbed in a math activity, for example, he may suddenly instigate something at a classmate without warning. Other times, he will randomly and generously distribute new pencils or stickers to schoolmates, yet immediately after scribble on another's work or snip a fellow student's hair. It appears as if Jason is most comfortable with and adept at engaging in "emotionally sterile" activities whereas he demonstrates greater discomfort with and is seemingly incapacitated by tasks invoking feelings. Over the past three years, relatively little social maturity has been observed. Although he appears to be able to discern between the more socially acceptable normative behavior and is more cognizant or aware of higher levels of conduct, he does not necessarily feel at that higher level or intensity.

Although Jason appears to be emotionally detached from his peers and teachers, there is, interestingly, a connection with playmates on a shared imaginative level or with other students working on an intellectual level—usually working on an advanced math task or project. Jason continues to assume very little responsibility and demonstrates a lack of internal locus of control for his work, behavior and attitude. Although he does not outright blame others, Jason negates his conscious actions, conveying instead that his conduct is influenced by an external force.

Level Two (Unilevel Disintegration)

Dealing with students at this level is frustrating because they perceive and acknowledge discrepancies, hence their constant ambivalence and ambidencies, two of the dynamisms most predominant at this stage. Because of their lack of internal locus of control, they are continually complaining and blaming others while being ignorant of their own hypocrisy. Teachers must encourage these students to focus on their own behavior rather than on blaming others, and must point out students' hypocrisy when they criticize others.

How disconcerting to observe the chronic bitter malcontent in an eight-year-old boy! George's persistent questioning was tolerable if one perceived it as genuine curiosity. His constant complaining and sour attitude, however, were particularly exhausting because he failed to assume ownership for his role or responsibility within the situation or incident in question. In accordance with Dabrowski's theory, George was not assuming internal locus of control. On the contrary, his continuous pointing out of discrepancies, yet his inability to perceive the hypocrisy in his frequent criticism or actions, reflects his external locus of control.

People generally do not enjoy being in the company of a constantly negative person. Because of his laudable athletic skills, however, he has established credibility on the soccer field, yet his poor sportsmanship is looked upon with disdain. Nevertheless, he is accustomed to having people constantly appease him, which does not help in getting him to assume greater responsibility for his behavior or attitude. Compliments and apologies are extremely hard to come by with George, as he is usually finding fault, criticizing, pointing out inconsistencies and constantly complaining. George, however, also has a difficult time accepting compliments.

Pointing out how George acted similarly in a past situation, but ensuring it is in a manner that enables him to save face and maintain his dignity, seems to be more effective. It also provides the opportunity for him to own up and to demonstrate consideration for others. I would often associate or refer to his relatively greater patience and ability to overlook his close friend Allan's lack of athletic ability and idiosyncrasies. I would encourage him to react to others more favorably by thinking about how he would respond to Allan in the same situation.

Perhaps his soft spot for Allan is because Allan allows George to be himself without sensing any passed judgment. Nevertheless, Allan will not compromise what he feels strongly about, which George respects. For instance, George respects Allan's refusal to participate in his birthday party activity, Laser Quest, because of its perceived violence and aggression. Even though there is no direct physical contact, it does involve using a laser weapon to shoot the opponents. So instead of subjecting Allan to the awkwardness of this situation, arrangements were made to have Allan celebrate George's birthday with the family instead of with the friends.

Because George expends his energy on the many physical activities in which he is engaged, he is not physically restless. His pensiveness, however, reflects continuous metacognitive processes and unsettled emotionality. At eight years of age, George was extremely conscientious about what he consumed and how it affected or might affect his body. Upon reading the labels of chocolate bars, he limited himself to one that was permissible. Because of his perfectionist tendencies and extreme competitiveness, he will not attempt a task without being guaranteed success. He attempts to compensate by persistent questioning about the task at hand.

The prominent dynamisms of unilevel disintegration (ambivalence and ambivalencies) are evident in George's desire for his parents' approval, yet he is disturbed by this need. Despite his awareness of higher level conduct or options more considerate of others, his decisions and actions are primarily egotistically enacted or calculated. Although George is not malicious, acts of goodwill for which he is applauded for following through are seldom self-initiated. Over the past three years, George has unfortunately become more solemn and less articulate in expressing his thoughts, ideas and feelings.

Level Three (Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration)

Although students at this level pose a considerably greater challenge for teachers, this level is more gratifying for teachers because they can observe and acknowledge students' success. Contrary to the predominant belief that a negative self-concept is bad, this extremely difficult and tumultuous time endured by students allows for personal growth. Hence, teachers have the opportunity to assist students in self-understanding and to encourage self-appreciation.

This level is more emotionally draining because of the energy invested in hoping for positive change. The energy is replenished or refueled, however, in acknowledging the students' sincerity and resolve in wanting to be genuinely better despite repeatedly messing up. It is reassuring to observe and acknowledge that higher structures are replacing lower levels of moral conduct.

Perceptive students acknowledge teachers' intuitiveness and understanding of what the students are about. Therefore, they will be less inclined to try to pull the wool over the teachers' eyes. Consequently, energy will be expended more constructively toward academic endeavors, self-growth, altruistic acts and so forth.

Dissatisfaction with oneself and feelings of shame are the predominant dynamisms

experienced at this stage. Others cannot minimize this experience for the students, as mentioned previously. However, teachers can be most supportive by acknowledging the reality of the students' emotions, empathizing with the students' inner turmoil, assisting the students in considering the consequences of the various alternatives, making constructive suggestions and encouraging the potentially best decision. Especially during this most emotionally fragile transitional stage, teachers must remember not to take students' reactions personally but to understand that students need to weather the storm before the calm. Teachers should encourage the students to focus on what they can control and, therefore, can do and to capitalize on the students' inner strength or intestinal fortitude. Referrals or references to mentors, especially people who have endured and overcome similar conflicts and emotional turbulence, would be supportive.

Instill within the students the wisdom of discerning between things that can be changed and those that can't.

I realized Andrew was quite sensitive to and easily distracted by environmental conditions. However, when he would run out of the room with his hands over his ears screaming, exit a room plugging his nose with eyes watering or turn off the lights in the room, I thought he was overreacting! Dabrowski's sensual OE provides greater introspection or insight into how magnified sounds, smells and other senses are for Andrew. In hindsight, I can understand why Andrew appreciated my constant playing of soft and soothing music and either closing the blinds or leaving the lights turned off. If there was a strong or offensive odor in the room or building, Andrew or the entire class would be permitted to leave the affected room until the odor dissipated.

Andrew has a rather sophisticated palate for a seven-year-old, considering he relishes black olives in his sandwiches, artichokes and exotic Dim Sum fare—

tastes, textures and appearances that even some adults do not fancy! If a certain article of clothing is uncomfortable in any way, he refuses to wear it.

Despite being physically uncoordinated, Andrew has an amazing visual-spatial aptitude. While other students would attempt to draw decipherable two-dimensional illustrations, Andrew would incorporate a third dimension or different perspective in his drawings. When explaining the computer hardware, he is able to depict graphically and describe the interior and functioning of the CPU (computer processing unit) or monitor. His first gift to me was a drawing depicting his idea of the depleting ozone layer. Also with respect to the imaginative OE, his strictly-by-the-book mentality renders actual role playing more difficult as it conflicts with his notion of reality. However, his vivid imagination is evident in some of his interesting suggestions, stories or comments and extraordinary ideas for innovative inventions.

In terms of his intellectual OE, Andrew demonstrates tremendous knowledge of many topics and issues of concern. He is, however, quite ignorant of himself and is somewhat frightened by his body's physiological functioning. For example, he became rather hysterical over an incident upon dismissal and started hyperventilating. He began hitting his head and his chest frantically when he felt lightheaded and his heart was pounding. I finally comforted him only by holding him firmly while softly instructing him to slow his breathing down and reassuring him that the physiological sensations he was experiencing were a natural consequence of hyperventilating and getting into a frenzy. I attribute his relatively irrational anxiety partly to his experiences with trial medications that he has had to consume.

Andrew not only has to contend with his own difficulties and conflicting emotions

but also subconsciously bears the weight of his mother's frustrations and disappointment regarding his behavior and performance. Needless to say, he is already shouldering environmental concerns beyond his tender young age. I am rather amazed at some of the ideas he shared with me for getting rid of air and noise pollution, for example, and various other environmental issues. Given Andrew's perceptiveness, his parents were advised by the school counsellor to refrain from responding so emotionally and from attributing an emotional undertone to everything. I was especially careful, therefore, not to unnecessarily contribute greater guilt, shame, self-denial and other frustrations that Andrew already overwhelmingly possessed. As one cannot force change within another, my effort with Andrew was encouraging him in assuming greater locus of control.

Andrew's relative social ineptness accounts for his overpossessive behavior with those whom he has befriended or vice versa. He is as devastated perceiving a friend's betrayal as he is endeared by a peer's kindness. That is, the emotional intensity with which he experiences such interpersonal interactions and situations is evident.

Andrew is perhaps one of the most emotionally exhausting and fragile students whom I have taught. It is disheartening to observe how emotionally withdrawn, saddened or angry Andrew is most of the time. Dabrowski's assertion that a person's endowment with strong OE cannot be suppressed but will manifest itself in some form of expression, explains how emotionally Andrew perceives everything despite his attempts to refrain from feeling.

My interpretation that the emotional heaviness and turmoil Andrew experienced in the past were too painful and overwhelming concur with this aspect expressed in Dabrowski's multilevel disintegration. His theory helps substantiate

my observation: considering how emotionally endowed Andrew is, it appears as if he desires to be emotionally numb. This emotional reticence—expressed by fronting a stone or glazed facial expression (despite the welling tears in his eyes)—is meant to alleviate the overwhelming pain of negative feelings. As a consequence of his normatively inappropriate reactions—given his idiosyncratic OE to various situations and experiences—Andrew is constantly bombarded with feelings of guilt, frustration, shame, self-loathing and distrust in himself and his capabilities.

Despite the repeated incidences of succumbing to lower-level behavior, I could sense the genuine resolve and his heart-felt earnestness to improve his behavior. Moreover, Andrew's sincere remorse discloses a moral conscience. Needless to say, I felt compelled to assist however possible. According to Dabrowski, although no one can minimize a person's emotional experience, significant others can provide emotional support and encouragement. It has been delightful observing Andrew grow into his own over the past four years, smiling more freely and laughing more wholeheartedly.

Level Four (Organized Multilevel Disintegration)

This stage is one of self-direction for the students and rejoicing for the teachers because of the personal growth and inner peace achieved and observed. Students are comfortable walking to their own beat and, for the most part, are exceptional and positive role models. As explained by Kohlberg's (1976) stages of moral development, the higher level of conduct to which one is exposed is adopted without question.

Self-awareness and autonomy are the predominant dynamisms experienced at this penultimate stage. Hence teachers can capitalize on the students' internal locus of control by encouraging them to focus on what

they can control, to act responsibly and accordingly, to be exemplary role models and to continue self-reflection and self-challenge in a variety of situations.

Crash! No one ever gets alarmed or really even turns a head anymore because everyone knows that David has merely tipped over from rocking on his chair . . . again! His classmates and I are used to his constant tumbling, thumping his pencil or other fidgeting. He is not intentionally trying to be disruptive. As a matter of fact, he is somewhat annoyed by his own perpetual restlessness and is most apologetic. Despite his concerted effort, however, it was quite a challenge for David to remain still.

David is inherently curious, observant and inquisitive. He likes to examine everything in depth. He is rather adept at distinguishing odors he smells and sounds he hears. His adeptness at handling objects carefully is another story, however, despite his concerted effort in being cautious.

David possesses healthy self-understanding, self-appreciation and self-discipline. Upon our initial acquaintance, he naively but sincerely informed me, "Basically, I'm brilliant!" to which his father responded, "As you can see, he has no problem with self-confidence!"

His resistance to temptation has been observed on several occasions when he has passed up without reservation chocolate or ice cream. Despite his liking for both, they may contain an ingredient that might have set off anaphylactic shock.

David's graphically descriptive stories and ideas and his cleverly constructed and functional inventions reflect his creativity and vivid imagination. He enjoys role playing immensely, and he really gets into playing characters. All enjoy watching him as much as he enjoys entertaining others.

David exudes a strong sense of honesty, integrity and sentimentality. He will unquestionably conduct himself in a manner he deems most moral and thoughtful.

In the event of a situation or incident, David can be relied on to relay every detail as objectively as he perceives, not withholding his role and responsibility either. His modeling of taking responsibility for one's actions by admitting to any wrongdoing and apologizing is exemplary. Everyone acknowledges that David would never intentionally harm another (clearly explaining why his classmates nicknamed him Golden Heart).

Despite how unpopular or unfavorable his actions or articulated stance may be initially, he is respected for his sincerity and dignity by peers and commended by adults. In the name of justice, for example, David would stand up and befriend a person being unfairly treated and enable others to see the person's positive qualities by pointing them out to his peers. I have fond recollections of David face-to-face with his hands firmly on Mark's shoulders and seriously counselling him, "Mark, you have to have hope! You have to believe in yourself!"

David can always be counted on to see the positive in even the most dismal of circumstances, with a constructive attitude of making the best of any situation. An unfortunate cancellation of a field trip, for instance, can be "considered a blessing in disguise considering the weather and terrible road conditions."

David used to get agitated when his choice among alternatives was not the most considerate. It is as if he possesses an altruistic filter within himself—guilt registers if his initial or instantaneous desire is not the one he would consider the most unselfish. For example, he felt guilty when he wanted time to himself or perhaps to play with others whom he usually does not—as opposed to playing with the usual group of friends with whom he normally associates and who expect his company. Over the past four years, he has come to terms and managed to satisfy his own needs while endeavoring to be his altruistic self.

David has progressively struggled less internally when his heartfelt actions conflict with and potentially offend or may be disapproved by significant others, such as his parents, teachers and close friends. His best friend, for example, has a severe peanut allergy, so if anyone accidentally brings a peanut butter sandwich or treats that contain peanuts for lunch, David ensures that he brings the school's policy regarding food restrictions to the offending party's attention. Likewise, he will ensure that everyone gets a fair opportunity on the computer by monitoring his classmates' time at the screen and instructing another to do the same with him, despite how gravitated he is to the computer.

One enjoys David's company because of his healthy disposition. Time or energy never has to be expended on figuring him out or sizing him up since he is what one sees. On first impression, one might view David as boastful or conceited but will soon discover he is unquestionably sincere and entirely truthful. David is definitely one to walk his own beat and his comfort with himself is refreshing. One cannot help but to appreciate his contagious enthusiasm for life. Despite his intense and passionate feelings about many things, my observations of how he has learned to control his overwhelmingly emotional display over the past four years concur with all that is encompassed within Dabrowski's organized multilevel disintegration. It is rewarding to acknowledge David attaining greater inward contentment and harmony because he has discovered how to be altruistic to others and true to himself without compromise.

Level Five (Secondary Integration)

Personality ideal is the predominant dynamism at this optimal or ultimate stage. One's exemplary conduct and altruism is an unquestionable testimony and role modeling to be attained.

Lana is one of the most emotionally serene and socially mature gifted students whom I have taught. Despite the depth of her understanding of global issues, environmental concerns and interpersonal differences, the inner peace she exudes is due to her responsible attitude. That is, she is conscientious in doing what she is able to make a difference, and she will continue to look for opportunities to better the world around her. Not only does she possess a healthy understanding and appreciation of herself, she consistently demonstrates wisdom beyond her years. Her intuitive sense and social adeptness enable her to interact effectively with peers and adults alike. Parent volunteers and her peers are often impressed with her introspective ability and the diplomacy she exercises in making others more aware and considerate of others and of various situations. By nature, Lana usually ends up assuming the mediator role between friends or peers in conflict.

Lana possesses a voracious appetite for books and thoroughly enjoys reading. Hence the manner in which she tells and writes stories is indicative of her creativity and vivid imagination. She is also rather adept at assuming the role of various characters and will intuitively improvise or ad lib with appropriate gestures, speech and so forth.

It is endearing to acknowledge the empathetic capacity demonstrated by this eight-year-old girl. As well as being a good listener, she is known for her perceptiveness, good judgment and responsible role modeling. The internal locus of control and fine qualities that she consistently exhibits will serve her well in her aspirations of becoming a tremendous physician.

The rare person, such as Mother Teresa or Gandhi, attains absolute internal peace and harmony. I would like to believe that, given optimal nurturing and environmental factors, people endowed with such fine

qualities as exhibited by Lana possess a greater potential for attaining secondary positive integration.

Conclusion

My review of Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration and of others' scholarly endeavors to interpret and/or to apply his complex theory of development has been personally enriching and revealing. In addition to providing a theoretical framework on which to base my observations of student conduct, the various components of his theory also offer existential meaning to my own experiences and validation of my overwhelming emotions. I consider his theory particularly pertinent but not exclusive to the gifted.

Dabrowski's theory of personality development provides helpful insight and clarity in understanding the behavior and attitudes of people. It has also enlightened me with explanations accounting for seemingly contradictory behaviors and attitudes that I was previously at a loss to comprehend. Perhaps it is because I, as yet, do not fully grasp the theory, but at this point I do not feel that Dabrowski's theory is all-encompassing to fully explain the complexity of all people's motivations. Only time and deeper understanding through further research will enable me to determine whether Dabrowski's theory can answer perplexing questions such as the following:

- Will the notion that a person's level of development is predetermined result in an attitude of futility and apathy on behalf of the teachers' attempts to improve a student's attitude and behavior? Likewise, will repeated attempts by a student to demonstrate an improved disposition ultimately invoke a defeatist mentality?
- Despite the acknowledgment that the gifted are generally more prone to experience tumultuous inner turmoil, is there any distinction between genders? Caution needs to be exercised in determining

whether females' relatively more overt expression of emotional turbulence camouflages males' experiences of inner conflict. Therefore, does this mean that one gender generally achieves higher levels of development?

- Can it be determined if a person has essentially achieved his or her maximum level of development? If so, what are the implications of telling a person this?
- Given the increase in violence among the student population, is there positive or constructive potential in assessing the level of development of the perpetrators or instigators? For example, are most of them level-one sociopaths, who lack remorse and a conscience? Or are they primarily level-two mindless complaints or blaming hypocrites seeking revenge? Perhaps it is the level-three sufferers retaliating for unsolicited bullying. On the other hand, could it be the unexpected level fours who believe their aggression will achieve greater peace or some desirable resolution? What about students with extreme imaginative OE who have difficulty distinguishing between fiction and reality? That is, could this information and knowledge assist in the forewarning of potentially life-threatening incidents or is it opening more of a Pandora's box?
- Can it be determined whether in schools that have mandated and implemented a more affective curriculum to the students are more equipped to weather the challenging emotional turmoil constructively? In essence, has the affective education better prepared and benefited society and the individual?

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