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## BOOK REVIEWS

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Dona J. Matthews, *Book Review Section Editor*

Mendaglio, S. (Ed.). (2007). *Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press (308 pp., \$39.95, cloth, ISBN: 0-910707-84-7).

With this edited volume, Sal Mendaglio sets out to integrate under one cover the multiple facets of Kazimierz Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration (TPD). To this end, he invited 11 authors to write on a variety of related topics and personally contributed 2 chapters to this 13-chapter book.

Section one, "The Theory of Positive Disintegration," contains 7 chapters, beginning with a biographical portrait of Dabrowski and going on to explain the theory itself, as well as Dabrowski's perspectives on education, authentic mental health, the relationship between TPD and philosophy, and creativity.

The second section, "TPD and Giftedness," focuses on the application of TPD to the field of gifted education and its contribution to understanding gifted development. The final chapter of this section is a review of the research literature on overexcitabilities, an aspect of TPD that posits heightened excitability in one or more of five different areas. These areas include emotional (intense feelings), imaginal (creativity), intellectual (curiosity), sensual (sensory pleasure), and psychomotor (high levels of physical activity). It should be noted that the overexcitabilities have received more popular attention in our field than have other important aspects of the theory. Clearly, there are useful applications of the OEs within gifted education, but the conversation should not stop there.

Also in the second section, there is a discussion of the levels of development that a person has the *potential* to move through (regardless of age), from being motivated by basic drives and conformity to being motivated by values and autonomy. If an individual moves from Level I through II, III, and IV, Level V represents the apex of human development, where the individual experiences no inner conflict and instead there is an alignment between an individual's higher level and his or her behavior, toward a more integrated experience. It should be noted that Level V is rarely reached and is reserved for individuals such as Abraham Lincoln and Peace Pilgrim. Life experiences that

could lead a person to struggle with instability, disharmony, and psychological breakdown, in a Dabrowskian context, can be transformative, allowing and driving potential growth and progression along the lower levels of development.

In the third and final section, 3 chapters address "TPD in Perspective." This section considers the application of aspects of the theory to psychological constructs such as personality integration and emotional development and compares TPD to other theories of personality. Historically, although TPD in the United States has found a home within the educational literature (and gifted education in particular), in the preface, Mendaglio argues for the importance of placing Dabrowski within the psychological literature, where the theory more truly belongs but where it has received little or no theoretical or research attention.

Also in this section is Laurence Nixon's chapter on TPD and mysticism, which explores the connections between Dabrowski's theory and the lives and approaches of mystic. Its inclusion as a chapter seems appropriate, given the recurrence of the spiritual themes throughout much of the book. Dabrowski's interest in the spiritual and its reflection in these discussions are clearly illustrated. As Amend notes in chapter 6, "Throughout his life, Dabrowski was oriented toward and moved by the highest spiritual realities."

In this book, Mendaglio brings together writings that cover a wide range of topics related to TPD that had not previously met in a single volume. One of the book's strengths is its coverage of the theory, written in the personal voices of each of the chapter authors, many of whom studied or worked with Dabrowski. The personal tone of the writings makes the theory more accessible, as Dabrowski himself comes to life through the authors' stories. For example, in Rankel's chapter "Dabrowski and Authentic Education," she refers to Dabrowski himself as "a living example of his theory." The TPD novice can pick up this text and become acquainted with the theory and its application in a variety of settings, from diverse authentic perspectives and with a clear vision of the person from which the theory emerged.

What has also been captured in this text is the complexity of the theory. The necessity of disintegration for one's personal development often gets lost within gifted education's use of the theory. Disintegration is not an easy experience; it involves discomfort, inner conflict, and feelings of insecurity. It likely involves some depression and psychological chaos. But it is through these experiences that a person has the potential to reintegrate. This reintegration may be positive or negative, presenting the person with the opportunity to experience emotional and psychological growth or to remain in a chaotic psychological state.

Unfortunately, in the attempt to cover the breadth of applications of Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration, the overall message of the book is somewhat muddled, and the audience for this text is unclear. Though readers who are generally interested in the theory itself will be quite satisfied, most teachers will struggle with the emphasis on theory and lack of educational application, and most psychologists will want to see more examples of the theory in clinical practice. Because of this, this text seems ideal for graduate study in psychology or education. Additional clarity to a wider readership might have been provided with an interweaving of chapters through editorial comment.

Mendaglio invited a range of contributors that include some of Dabrowski's former students, colleagues, and researchers. Sadly, the recent passing of Michael Pyryt makes this one of his final contributions to the field of gifted education and psychology.

The time for this book has come. It fills a niche that has been empty for some time. Until now, there were scattered chapters in texts, and Dabrowski's own writings, but no single source that synthesized TPD and its application. Mendaglio's *Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration* provides a great deal of background material and theoretical explication, but the reader who is looking to apply the theory in educational or counseling settings may need to wait for a Volume 2, still to come. We would love to see such a book that focuses more heavily on applications of the theory to educational and psychological practice, providing examples of the Dabrowskian lens in schools and counseling settings. Until another volume is published, however, this may well be the best basic source book for those seeking to understand Dabrowski and the theory of positive disintegration—the first book to seek out and a valuable resource for those new to the theory.

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Daniels, S., & Piechowski, M. M. (Eds). (2008). *Living With Intensity: Understanding the Sensitivity, Excitability, and Emotional Development of Gifted Children, Adolescents, and Adults*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press (260 pp., \$26.95, pb, ISBN: 0-910707-89-8).

Susan Daniels and Michael Piechowski have coedited a volume geared toward understanding the theory and practical application of Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration (TPD). Readers interested in Dabrowski will be pleased to find their understanding of TPD enhanced, especially if they seek to better understand intense children and adults at different stages of the life span.

The first two chapters explain TPD, discussing developmental potential, overexcitabilities, and developmental levels. These chapters are clear and succinct, with biographical sketches of Peace Pilgrim and others that illustrate the theory. Of particular note is the application of TPD in education and counseling settings. In the closing paragraph of the first chapter, Daniels and Piechowski sum up nicely the relevance of TPD and the shift in thinking about children and adults with intensity that must occur to view them with a Dabrowskian lens. They write:

[I]t becomes clear that our children must be reared and educated in an environment of mutual compassion, understanding, and positive adjustment—not simply adjustment to the changing material conditions of life. We must also recognize that our potential for growth does not end with childhood. The evolution of one's personality is an individual, autonomous process of perceiving, feeling, intuiting, and striving for that which is higher and truer in oneself *throughout one's life* [italics added]. (p. 23)

Part 2, "Understanding Intensity: Practical Applications for Parents, Teachers, and Counselors," includes in-depth illustrations of work in clinical settings with intense individuals, through case studies of multiple clients. This is particularly evident in two chapters from P. Susan Jackson and Vicky Moyle, who demonstrate the conceptual link between Dabrowski's theory and the skillful clinical application of counseling with children, adolescents, and adults. Also in this second part of the book is a chapter by Annemarie Roeper, drawing on her years of experience in the education of the gifted, as well as on her own life, on the perceptual skills of gifted children. This part includes a fine chapter by Edward Amend that discusses the differences between clinical work with a Dabrowskian lens in contrast