

"Imagining the Way"

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

**19th Annual SAGE Conference
The Society for the Advancement of Gifted Education**



Conference Proceedings produced by
The Society for the Advancement of Gifted Education
c/o Centre for Gifted Education
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Tillier's response to Piechowski ¹

I thank Dr. Piechowski for his comments. The early introductions of Dąbrowski's theory to the gifted community were all derived from Piechowski's interpretation of Dąbrowski's ideas. It is difficult to accept the adequacy of these introductions in light of the fact that authors in the gifted field continue to display a very weak or mangled understanding of Dąbrowski's original position (see Tillier, 2009).

Piechowski says that he consciously avoided emphasizing psychoneuroses, stating "To try to explain psychoneuroses in that climate would have been disastrous." The result of this decision is that Dąbrowski's (1967) basic observation about gifted children – that the development of their personality should occur through the process of positive disintegration – has never been tested. Also, the validity and explanatory power of overexcitability as an independent concept, removed from its context of psychoneuroses and positive disintegration, is questionable.

As Piechowski points out, he consistently referred to Dąbrowski's *theory of emotional development* in a broader generic or categorical sense but this distinction was often not understood. For example, Piirto (1997, Section 4 Issues of the spirit, ¶1) said ". . . the Dąbrowski Theory of Positive Disintegration (as it is called in Canada, or of Emotional Development as it is called in the United States). . . ." In addition, Piechowski's usage easily contributed to a misimpression for new readers in terms of what Dąbrowski's theory was about. Dąbrowski's work is about personality growth and is more correctly described as a theory of personality development as it is not mainly concerned with the development of emotion.

In his response Piechowski says that Dąbrowski's theory would lose none of its value if levels I and II were not included. Dąbrowski's expressed purpose was to create a theory that could account for the lowest examples of human behavior as well as the highest. Thus, based upon his observations of the lack of development seen at the lowest levels, Dąbrowski described Level I as the starting point of his theory and he did call it primary integration and he indicated that the majority of people are classified at this level. If you remove Level I and Level II, it isn't "Dąbrowski's theory" anymore. Also, Piechowski notes that "If multilevel potential is present it precludes the possibility of Level I." This statement stands at odds with Dąbrowski's whole notion of advanced development; spurred on by strong developmental potential and progressing *from* primary integration *through* positive disintegration *to* secondary integration.

In reference to Level II, Piechowski may be correct that there are more paths to development than Dąbrowski described. However, as I have encouraged him in the past, Piechowski's research and his theory of development should be presented as his own. Piechowski's ideas, including his new and more positive hypothesis about Level II, can then be compared to

¹ Tillier, W. (2009). Tillier's response to Piechowski. In J. Frank, H. Curties, & G. Finlay, (Eds.). *Imagining the way: Proceedings from the 19th Annual SAGE Conference* (pp. 75 - 77). Unpublished Manuscript. (Proceedings from the 19th Annual SAGE Conference. November 7-8, 2008, University of Calgary, Calgary AB.).

Dąbrowski's original theory and Dąbrowski's view of Level II, which did have a distinctly transitional, crisis-oriented and potentially pathological aspect.

On the issue of Dąbrowski and Maslow, I stand by the discussions that I had with Dr. Dąbrowski and the material I presented both in my presentation at SAGE and in Tillier (2008). Although Piechowski says that Dąbrowski "never understood" the merits of placing self-actualizing people within his theory, as my discussions with Dąbrowski clearly indicated, he would not embrace Maslow's concept of self-actualizing people as it stood at odds with the principles and values articulated in his theory -- it was not an issue of descriptive power or popularity.

Finally, Dąbrowski certainly understood the merits of his work as a theory and its emergent and fluid nature. The seventy-two hypotheses for further research presented in Dąbrowski (1970) illustrate his invitation to others to research and further develop his theory. My historical concern has been and remains that one should have the benefit of a complete and clear appreciation for Dąbrowski's original concepts when considering the contribution of new research and the merits of new approaches and theories of development. In this way, an informed comparison of the original with the new approaches can be made. The imprecision of Piechowski's work concerning Dąbrowski and his mysterious reluctance to publish his own theory remains an impediment to ongoing theory development.

Dąbrowski, K. (1967). *Personality-shaping through positive disintegration*. Boston: Little Brown & Co.

Dąbrowski, K. (with Kawczak, A., & Piechowski, M. M.).(1970). *Mental growth through positive disintegration*. London: Gryf Publications.

Piirto, J. (1997). *Twelve issues: Implications of post-modern curriculum theory for the education of the talented*. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Association for Gifted Children Conference, Little Rock, AR. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from <http://personal.ashland.edu/~jpiirto/twelve.htm>

Tillier, W. (2008). Introduction of the concept of multilevel actualization. In W. Tillier (Ed.), *Dąbrowski and Gifted Education: Beyond Overexcitabilities: Proceedings from the 8th International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development* (pp. 55-115). Unpublished Manuscript. (August 7 - 9, 2008 Canmore, Alberta, Canada).

Tillier, W. (2009). Dąbrowski without the theory of positive disintegration just isn't Dąbrowski. *Roeper Review*, 31(2), 123 - 126. doi: 10.1080/02783190902737699