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Through the Dąbrowski Lens: Wisdom, Transformational Giftedness, and the Personality Ideal

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Utopia has been defined as "a perfect society in which people work well with each other and are happy" (Cambridge University Press, 2021). Pure fantasy? Well, perhaps; however, it is more than reasonable to consider that humanity can strive toward an existence that is considerably closer to that ideal than is presently the case – one where there is a fundamental respect and value for all peoples and the planet we inhabit. Of course, the million-dollar question is: How? The answer will always be embedded in human behaviors, which are governed by human beliefs and values.

There are many examples from the twentieth century where humanity has demonstrated less than ideal uses of its capabilities (Karami et al., 2020). One would hope that from these indictments there are changed behaviors into the future, perhaps as a result of our 20/20 retrospective vision. History and hindsight show us clearly that knowledge, intelligence, and power are not enough to ensure anything close to a Utopian future. Humanity is thankfully a rich kaleidoscope of peoples, each with individual needs, desires, abilities, and inclinations for their respective lives; and through this, we have hope for the future.

As educators, we see learners who are passionate leaders, who care for humanity, who are developing ethical behaviors or may already have a strong sense of justice, and who are intent on making the world a better place for all.

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There may well also be people of all ages, not just those in our classrooms, who are more hidden – those who, for whatever reasons, don't make their desires in this regard easily visible. How do we identify and support all these young people, including those who may be hidden? What are some of the key traits they may display? How do we identify the capacity of these individuals to participate in the transformation of our world, whether it be at a global, national, local, or community level? How does this relate to gifted education, to the young people identified as gifted, and to us as educators?

Ambrose and Sternberg (2016a, b), with colleagues, present two works focusing on the importance of creative intelligence in problem solving, particularly in consideration of both the larger challenges facing humanity as a global community; and the place of gifted education into the twenty-first century. These works advocate for a new approach, based on some stark realities of life in our present times, and the need for humanity to improve. Concurrently Sternberg (2016) introduced his Active Concerned Citizens and Ethical Leadership (ACCEL) model for universities, which evolved into a new method of identifying giftedness. Placing importance on factors beyond intelligence as measured by IQ tests, and engagement with this model, may help educators better equip gifted learners to engage with the future world (Sternberg, 2017). Through ACCEL, Sternberg advocates that a core goal of gifted education activities should be to support the development of

> the next generation of active concerned citizens and ethical leaders (ACCEL)…[noting] that the greatest problem we have in our society is not a lack of leaders with high IQs or sterling academic credentials but rather a lack of transformational leaders who behave in ethical ways to achieve, over the long term as well as the short term, a common good for all. (2017, p. 157)

Underpinning the ACCEL model is the construct of wisdom, where an individual's knowledge and skills are specifically used in transformational ways, through the inclusion of positive ethical values. From this foundation stems the conceptions of "transactional giftedness" and "transformational giftedness" that were introduced into the gifted education literature (Sternberg, 2020b, p. 231). Transformational giftedness is transformative. A transformationally gifted person will, at their core, be altruistic in motivation, and desire to make a positive, meaningful contribution toward the betterment of the world. A transactionally gifted individual can still, of course, make a positive contribution toward the greater good of humanity. Their motivation, however, will be rooted in a rewards-based system, whether that be, for example, personal accolades, remuneration, or appeasing a sense of obligation from previously being identified as 'gifted'. Sternberg, in his chapter in this book,

provides a list of eight transformationally gifted young people, all of whom are inspirational humans. He rightly points out that no one focusses on their IQ scores; and in fact, their IQs aren't really relevant.

The synthesis of this thinking displays an ideal vision – one where our planet's future, and that of humanity, is guided by transformationally gifted leaders, and whose ethical actions are based in wisdom. Neither transactional nor transformational giftedness result from being born in a certain way; rather, the form of giftedness is shaped from the "interaction between a person and the forms of instruction, mentorship, role-modelling, and socialization the person receives during the course of their development" (Sternberg, 2020b, p. 231). This is not to suggest, however, that any gifted individual who is guided and mentored in a transformational manner will, indeed, adopt that mode of being.

This ideal in turn, produces three fundamental questions:

1. What is wisdom?
2. What are the behaviors and characteristics associated with wisdom that may be displayed by our gifted learners; and
3. How else can we identify these learners and nurture these behaviors and characteristics as they develop?

In this chapter I reflect upon the Polyhedron Model of Wisdom as proposed by Karami et al. (2020) and the importance of the behaviors and characteristics identified with the concept of wisdom. I then introduce Kazimierz Dąbrowski's five-level Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) (Dąbrowski, 1966, 1967). The intricacies of Dąbrowski's theory provide an additional way of understanding the behaviors and experiences of our gifted learners, and with this understanding comes the capacity to nurture and support their developmental process.

The Polyhedron Model of Wisdom

The Polyhedron Model of Wisdom (PMW) (Karami et al., 2020) was developed from a systematic review of fifty of the most cited, peer-reviewed journal articles from the disciplines of psychology, management and leadership, and education; where the construct of wisdom was included in the title and key words. The analysis of the review data highlighted seven clusters of sub-constructs within the larger notion of 'wisdom'. Each of these sub-constructs were identified as a 'component' of wisdom. Consideration of both the broader construct of wisdom, and the components within the PMW provides some of

the answers to the previous questions (What is wisdom? and What are the behaviors and characteristics associated with wisdom that may be displayed by our gifted learners?).

Component One: Knowledge Management This component suggests that "a wise person not only possesses broad knowledge of the world and specialized forms of knowledge, but he or she also has the ability to effectively choose and apply the appropriate knowledge in varying situations" (Karami et al., 2020, p. 246). This process highlights the individual's capacity for reflection and discernment, plus the ability to differentiate between gaining knowledge (acquisition) and the appropriate use of that knowledge (management). Component one also addresses the need for critical analysis of knowledge (which may be useful in identifying 'fake news' – a phenomenon that has appeared in recent years through both social and mainstream, media); and for people to be "agents in their own education" (Karami et al., 2020, p. 247).

Component Two: Self-regulation This is a complex construct that involves a fundamental capacity for self-awareness, discernment, and adjustment across multiple facets of one's own self – including, but not limited to, emotion, intention, cognition, and behaviors. Within the PMW considerable importance is placed on the process of reflectivity within self-regulation (Karami et al., 2020, p. 247). The association between the capacity for self-reflection as self-regulation is also reflected in a number of other instances, for example the Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale (Webster, 2003, 2007) and the concept of insight within the San Diego Wisdom Scale (Thomas et al., 2019). Self-regulation, and its inherent capacity for self-awareness, discernment, and adjustment, is fundamental if an individual is to demonstrate ethical leadership and wisdom, or make a transformational difference to the world.

Component Three: Altruism and Moral Maturity This component brings together altruism and moral maturity, and associated ethical conduct and prosocial behaviors. The intersection of altruism, ethics, moral behaviors, and giftedness has been the subject of much consideration within the literature (Ambrose & Cross, 2009); however, it is also appropriate here to associate empathy with this group of traits (de Waal, 2008; Harper, 2013).

Component Four: Openness and Tolerance "Openness and tolerance are key for a world in need of peace and mutual understanding" (Karami et al., 2020, p. 249). Some authors presented by Karami et al. in Component four suggest that openness and tolerance lead to valuing relativism. There will always be room for continued academic discourse regarding the definition of

relativism. However, what is common through the works presented is the importance of understanding and accepting that humans as individuals, and the human experience, are all different, and as such, openness and tolerance are vital, especially given the increasing globalization of our world.

Component Five: Sound Judgement and Decision Making It is difficult to separate sound judgement and decision-making from the higher-order constructs of ethical behavior, moral thinking and in turn, wisdom. It could be argued that for a judgement or decision to be wise, it must also incorporate knowledge-based processes such as those outlined in Component one: Knowledge Management, along with ethical and moral considerations.

Whilst there is some dispute regarding an individual's capacity to effectively adopt another's perspective (Bandura, 1991; Davis, 1980, 1983), the analysis of the literature underpinning the current Component (Sound judgement and decision making) also highlights the importance of perspective taking as integral to the construct of wisdom. If a goal of wisdom is indeed to achieve an outcome for the "common good" (Karami et al., 2020, p. 250), then an authentic understanding and appreciation of, perhaps even empathy for, the situations relating to all parties must be embedded into sound judgement and decision-making processes.

Component Six: Intelligence and Creative Thinking It is not new that these two constructs are brought together. In 2016 Ambrose and Sternberg curated two influential volumes addressing both creative intelligence and giftedness, and their respective places in the twenty-first century; and Karami et al. (2020), in their analysis of wisdom studies also identify numerous instances where these constructs are united. Creative thinking and intelligence are fundamental attributes for transformationally gifted learners who may provide novel, wise, and ethical solutions to world problems.

Component Seven: Dynamic Balance and Synthesis Translated into Action Importantly, key elements in Component seven of the PMW are actionable outcomes and change, that come about as a result of the processes within the combined Components. Wisdom itself is greater than the sum of all its parts, and at its very essence, the proportions of the component structure are fluid and malleable in order to allow a person to respond reflectively and appropriately to any given situation or circumstance. "When wisdom is required, dynamic balance draws on the six elements to meet a need at the right moment and the right place, for the right reasons and purposes" (Karami et al., 2020, p. 251). The PMW is both developmental and experience-driven. Powerfully, it "is the lessons learned from the successes and failures that make

it useable" (2020, p. 252). If our gifted learners are able to harness and demonstrate a 'dynamic balance and synthesis' and follow up with appropriate actions, then they will indeed be demonstrating the potential to make a transformative difference into the future.

Having reflected upon the Polyhedron Model of Wisdom and its components (Karami et al., 2020), and discussed their relevance to transformationally gifted learners, I will now introduce the Theory of Positive Disintegration. This is a complex theory of personality development, which provides an additional, valuable approach for educators of gifted learners to use, as we attempt to identify students who have the potential to make a positive, transformative difference to our world.

The Theory of Positive Disintegration

Kazimierz Dąbrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) is a grand theory of personality development, comprising five levels of development that are non-ontogenetic, meaning they are not based on biological maturation or age levels.

In considering Dąbrowski's theory, it is pertinent to consider its genesis. Dąbrowski lived through World War I and was impacted significantly by many experiences, not the least of which was a battle near his hometown. Reflecting on his experiences, he said:

> The juxtaposition of inhuman forces and inhuman humans with those who were sensitive, capable of sacrifice, courageous, gave a vivid panorama of a scale of values from the lowest to the highest. (Dąbrowski, 1975, p. 233)

It is this juxtaposition, the contrasting scale of values, and the processes of development that Dąbrowski explains through his theory.

Dąbrowski uses a number of terms within the TPD. Many of these may exist in contemporary usage but have a slightly different meaning within the TPD context. The first of these is 'disintegration'. At its core, this refers to the collapsing or significant questioning of an individual's understanding of their own place in the world, their values, and their own sense of self-worth. This collapsing or questioning can range from a 'minor personal meltdown' through to a 'major existential crisis.' Disintegration will most often resolve upwards or downwards. If the resolution is downwards, the individual will re-integrate at the lower level. If the resolution is upwards, this is a positive disintegration with movement to (usually) the next higher level. The catalysts and mechanisms that trigger and facilitate disintegration will be discussed later.

Levels of Development

The numbering of the five levels of development within the TPD reflect their place in the process of development, with Level I being the lowest, and Level V being the highest. These are depicted in the following table along with a brief summary. Additional detail is provided following the Table 11.1.

At the centre of the TPD are two "qualitatively different phases of mental development…[The lower phase, or portion, is] unconscious or only partly conscious and is determined by biological forces or the influences of the external environment" (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 5). The higher phase is self-aware and deliberate, cognizant of the developing self, with a sense of place in the

Table 11.1 Levels of development within the Theory of Positive Disintegration

Level	Name	Abbreviated description
V	Secondary integration	Only a small number of people will ever achieve this level. There is no internal conflict around how one should live life because behaviors and values are in full alignment. Dąbrowski (1996, p. 20) describes people who have achieved this level as the epitome of "universal compassion and self-sacrifice"
IV	Organized multilevel disintegration	Self-development moves to the forefront of an individual's life. This is not sporadic, but focused and conscious, guided by a clear set of personal values, aims and life goals that are independently shaped, irrespective of peer norms
III	Spontaneous multilevel disintegration	Greater awareness of the inner self versus the external world, highlighted by introspection, self-assessment, and a sense of becoming a better version of yourself Awareness of higher and lower levels in terms of values, ethics, and behaviors Regret for past failings and determination to 'improve oneself' in the future, however personal crises relating to these feelings are spontaneous
II	Unilevel disintegration	This is a transitional phase, with periods of brief crises, with the opportunity for reflection on the purpose of one's life Frustration and uncertainty regarding choices/decisions/course of future action People experiencing Unilevel disintegration will generally either resolve back to primary integration, or move up to spontaneous multilevel disintegration
I	Primary integration	Needs are primary: Food, shelter, money Egocentric behaviors and stereotypic responses Desire to 'fit in' with a peer group; with little or no desire or capacity to differ from that peer group Responsibility and blame always eternalized to others, for example "You're wrong, I'm right" or "Look what you made me do"

environment and awareness of the developmental power of authentic, deliberate choices. The higher phase reflects the non-ontogenetic nature of development. It is in this phase where the mental, or psychological, forces of an individual combine with the individual's value system to determine the direction and degree of development (Mendaglio, 2008a). These phases exist at either end of a continuum (Tillier, Foreword in Dąbrowski, 2017).

The following section elaborates further upon each level of development.

Level I: Primary Integration This level is akin to that with which a child is born. Primary needs such as food, sleep and basic movement, are central instinctive needs that must be met (Dąbrowski, 2015). For the average person, behavior at this level "is controlled by a combination of primitive instincts and drives and by the external forces of socialization" (Tillier, 2018, p. 55). Whilst some people will grow beyond these structures as they develop, others will retain these behaviors throughout adulthood and are unaware of, and unresponsive to, other aspects and levels of reality. At this level, both cognitive structures and emotional responses are automatic and inflexible. People functioning at this level lack the capacity for internal conflict, but will externalise conflict and responsibility (Rankel, 2008) and display an egocentric demeanor with little, if any, inhibition (Miller & Silverman, 1987).

Level II: Unilevel Disintegration This is the first stage of disintegration. This level involves a time of inner conflict, identity confusions, even anxiety or despair. Within Unilevel Disintegration, an individual may have heightened sensitivity to external factors, and experience mood fluctuations or swings, from extreme enthusiasm to a state of depression (Dąbrowski, 1996). These emotional responses may trigger a limited capacity for decision making. At this level, the sensations and transitions are linked to the biological life cycle and are not related to the more developed autonomous transformations that occur at later levels. Level II is very much a transition phase from Level I and either leads to further disintegration at Level III or to a regression back to the stability of Primary Integration.

Level III: Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration This is a pivotal level where the individual's hierarchy of values begins to emerge and starts to influence their behavior. This change occurs as a result of self-reflection, evaluation, and a clearer, yet still developing, view of the 'type of person' one wants to be. With this emergence may come significant personal inner struggle or turbulence; however, this inner struggle is essential for development (Dąbrowski, 1976). An awareness arises of the conflict between the ideal and

existing self, and the individual, when reflecting on their own behaviors "can make conscious and volitional choices about what to emphasize and what aspects to inhibit" (Tillier, 2008, p. 106). These behaviors are molded by a hierarchy of values and life goals that emerge and transform over time as the individual progresses through the positive disintegration process. Movement to a higher level as a result of this inner struggle, rather than regressing to a lower one, Dąbrowski called 'positive maladjustment'. At Level III, behavioral and attitudinal changes are autonomous and conscious, embedded within the emotional discovery of self and frequently accompanied by existential exploration (Harper & Clifford, 2017). Additionally, Dąbrowski (1996, p. 111) suggested that at this level people may experience an increasing "enthusiasm for moral, esthetic, and emotional values, [and have an] attitude of respect for eminent people".

The capacity for an individual to 'step out of themselves' to view their place in the world both subjectively and objectively, is foundational to the development of a hierarchical understanding of the world. Dąbrowski referred to this as 'subject-object in oneself' and this, combined with the hierarchical view is also the basis upon which an individual's ultimate ideal persona, which Dąbrowski called the Personality Ideal, will be shaped. The capacity to view and experience the hierarchical nature of the world is what Dąbrowski called 'multilevelness'. These two experiences – subject-object in oneself and multilevelness – are key touchpoints between the TPD and transformationally gifted learners, who are developing the components of wisdom.

Level IV: Organised Multilevel Disintegration Here the individual takes conscious control over life and personal development. Examples are individual and personal, and will therefore differ from person to person, but may include choosing a different peer group, undertaking further learning (though not necessarily formal study), consciously walking away from situations of conflict in which they may have previously engaged, or seeking time and space for quiet contemplation or meditation. Level IV also sees an increase of stability in an individual's hierarchy of values, and provides a platform for the reduction of inner conflict, as behaviors align more closely with the Personality Ideal. With the stabilization of the value system comes increased self-awareness and the capacity for self-analysis.

Level V: Secondary Integration This level is only ever achieved by a very small number of people, where they reach the pinnacle of human development. In this level, there is a transcendental quality to personality and the human essence, hence Dąbrowski (1996, p. 20) describes it as the epitome of

"universal compassion and self-sacrifice." This level is also characterized by an "inner peace" (Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 193) that comes from the union of the very essence of one's life with the Personality Ideal – they are 'at one'. Dąbrowski refers to this achievement of 'oneness' as achieving 'Personality'. This is the ultimate goal of the process of positive disintegration, and at this point, all elements that contribute towards the positive disintegration process cease to be individually identifiable.

Progression Through the Levels

Transitioning between levels of Dąbrowski's TPD is not automatic, is neither achieved by all individuals or is it related to chronological age. Additional aspects of the theory interweave to provide the mechanisms for movement between the levels. These are categorized into three factors of development: heredity, environmental and social influences, and the Third Factor. They are a complex matrix of influencing factors that may facilitate the transition of an individual through some, or in a small number of cases, all of the five levels of development.

The following Figure aims to clarify these interactions and relationships, although it does introduce some concepts whose definition is beyond the scope of this chapter. Each factor is depicted at the top level of Fig. 11.1. Each factor is equally important, so they all appear at the same level. This figure, based on a graphical map of the Three Factors of Development (Harper et al., 2017), includes the relationship with the Disposing and Directing Center that sits within the Inner Psychic Milieu.

Explanation of Some Elements Within the Three Factors of Development

The Factors of Development The First Factor contains two elements: an individual's inherited endowment, called the Developmental Instinct; and the Developmental Potential, which "determines what level of development a person may reach if the physical and environmental conditions are optimal" (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 10). The Second Factor refers to aspects of the environmental and social world that may influence an individual's development. The Third Factor is "the agent of conscious choice of development, seen as the inner self that coordinates an individual's mental life" (Mendaglio, 2008a, p. 31). This Third Factor influences behavior through inner voices and self-

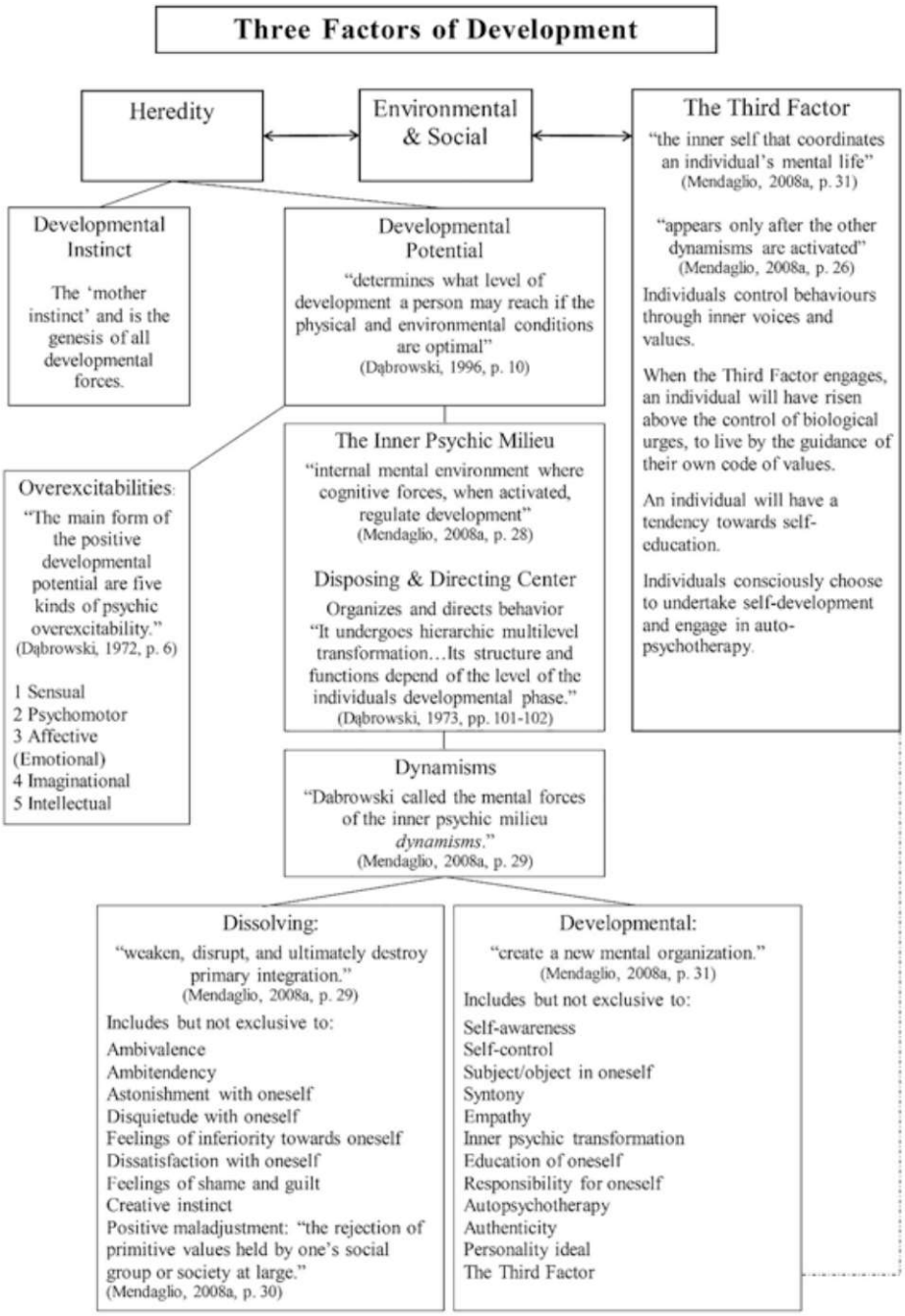

Fig. 11.1 Three factors of development

talk, governed by the principled development of conscience, all-the-while moving closer to the Personality Ideal.

Overexcitabilities There are five types of overexcitability (OE): emotional, imaginational, intellectual, psychomotor, and sensual. An individual's reactions are considered an overexcitability when they are "over and above average in intensity, duration and frequency" (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 71). As with all

human reactions, overexcitabilities will manifest differently at the varying levels of development, as they are multilevel constructs. Not everyone will exhibit overexcitabilities; they may be displayed at varying intensities. The following Table describes some of the ways the overexcitabilities may appear at the varying levels. They do not appear independently at Level V, as the 'oneness' of Personality sees all contributing elements merge (see Table 11.2).

Some overexcitabilities indicate a stronger Developmental Potential than others. Imaginational, intellectual, and emotional OEs are considered essential for development and are sometimes known as 'the big three' (Mendaglio, 2008b). Emotional OE has particular significance. Higher levels of

Table 11.2 Overexcitabilities within the Theory of Positive Disintegration

OE type	Abbreviated description	Sample of manifestations at the varying levels of development	
Sensual	"Sensual overexcitability is a function of a heightened experiencing of sensory pleasure. It manifests itself as a need for comfort, luxury, esthetics, fashions, superficial relations with others… In children {it may manifest as a need for cuddling, kissing, clinging… showing off." (1996, p. 72)	Level IV	Esthetic sensitivity, responsiveness to beauty in nature, art or music. Contributes to the expression of empathy
		Level III	Increasing introversion, less exhibitionism, inner conflict regarding lower-level behavior
		Level II	Awareness of one's sexuality. Egocentrism in sexual activity begins to weaken
		Level I	Excessive cuddling and kissing, excessive eating
Psychomotor	"Psychomotor overexcitability is a function of an excess of energy and manifests itself, for example, in rapid talk, restlessness, violent games, sports, pressure for action, or delinquent behavior." (1996, p. 72)	Level IV	Psychomotor OE "provides the dynamics and energy for carrying out a developmental program of action." (1996, p. 76)
		Level III	Psychomotor OE becomes more strategic and defined, harnessing activity and busyness in a more productive manner
		Level II	Activity, whilst still significant, becomes a little more controlled
		Level I	Violent irritability and uncontrollable temper, restlessness, need for frequent job changes, need to be constantly on the go

(*continued*)

Table 11.2 (continued)

OE type	Abbreviated description	Sample of manifestations at the varying levels of development	
Emotional	"Emotional overexcitability is a function of experiencing emotional relationships… [that] can manifest themselves as strong attachments to persons, living things, or places… [and] are not developmentally significant unless the experiential aspect of relationship is present." (1996, p. 72)	Level IV	Emotional OE "gives rise to elevated states of consciousness and profound empathy, depth and exclusivity of relationships of love and friendship. There is a sense of transcending and resolving of one's personal experiences in a more universal context." (1996, p. 77)
		Level III	Emotional OE brings the "differentiation of a hierarchy of feelings, growth of exclusivity of feelings and…[lasting] relationship of friendship and love." (1996, p. 76)
		Level II	"Fluctuations, sometime extreme, between inhibition and excitation, approach and avoidance, high tension and relaxation or depression…feelings of [both] inferiority and superiority." (1996, p. 76)
		Level I	"Aggressiveness, irritability, lack of inhibition, lack of control, envy, unreflective periods of isolation, or an incessant need for tenderness and attention." (1996, p. 76)

(*continued*)

Table 11.2 (continued)

OE type	Abbreviated description	Sample of manifestations at the varying levels of development	
Imaginational	"Imaginational overexcitability in its 'pure' form manifests itself through association of images and impressions, inventiveness, use of image and metaphor in verbal expression, strong and sharp visualization." (1996, p. 72)	Level IV	"The multilevel characteristics of imaginational overexcitability described for level III become intensified…They serve as tools of conscious development of personality." (1996, p. 77)
		Level III	"Imaginational overexcitability becomes more closely associated with emotional and intellectual forms…Dreams and visions of the ideal. Creative instinct makes contact with the instinct of self-perfection." (1996, p. 77)
		Level II	Imagination overexcitability may stimulate "intense visions of the future, egocentric fantasy (self-delusion) and anxiety states…[including frequent] dreams and daydreaming, interest in dream symbolism." (1996, p. 77)
		Level I	Imaginational OE may manifest in a heightened sense of self-importance. There is no evidence of humility. Public accolades and honoring are desired for oneself, based on the created self-image.

(*continued*)

Table 11.2 (continued)

OE type	Abbreviated description	Sample of manifestations at the varying levels of development	
Intellectual	"Intellectual overexcitability is manifested as a drive to ask probing questions, avidity for knowledge, theoretical thinking, reverence for logic, preoccupation with theoretical problems." (1996, p. 72)	Level IV	Intellectual interests are vast and of a higher-order, expanding upon the desire for meaning within Level III.
		Level III	Intellectual OE "enhances the development of awareness and self-awareness. It develops the need for finding the meaning of knowledge and of human experience…Development of intuitive intelligence." (1996, p. 78)
		Level II	Intellectual activity "can be extensive and brilliant but without systematization and evaluation of knowledge, to analyze…or to arrive at a deeper synthesis." (1996, p. 78)
		Level I	"Intellectual activity consists mainly of skillful manipulation of data and information ('a brain like a computer'). Intelligence rather than intellectual overexcitability serves as an instrument subservient to the dictates of primitive drives." (1996, p. 78)

Note: This Table is derived from original source material in the text *Multilevelness of Emotional and Instinctive Functions* (Dąbrowski, 1996, pp. 71–78)

development are only achieved "if in the constellation of all five forms the emotional is the strongest" (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 182). Advanced Emotional OE, enveloped in humility, ethical conduct, and empathy as described by Dąbrowski, may provide a means by which transformationally gifted learners can be identified.

As we reflect on the relevance of the overexcitabilities to transformationally gifted learners, it is important to clearly distinguish between 'intelligence' and Intellectual OE. Being 'smart' or gaining a high score on an IQ test is not enough to claim Intellectual OE. Intellectual OE, especially as the individual

moves in and around Level III (see Table 11.2, above; and Fig. 11.1 for the broader Levels of Development), will be based in motivation to make the world a better place. Using intelligence for selfish gain or ego-driven motivations are the polar opposite of a higher order Intellectual OE. Dąbrowski (1996, p. 78) reinforces this, saying that, at Level I, intelligence "rather than intellectual overexcitability serves as an instrument subservient to the dictates of primitive drives."

So, using the characteristics of the Overexcitabilities at their higher levels, with a particular focus on 'the big three' (Emotional, Imaginational, and Intellectual), along with other supporting behavioral examples, such as developmental dynamisms, may be highly significant in the process of identifying learners with the potential to become transformationally gifted.

Dynamisms A dynamism is a "biological or mental force controlling behavior and its development" (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 294). This moniker is indicative of the sense of motion that underpins the TPD. There are two groups of dynamisms: dissolving dynamisms, responsible for the 'disintegration' part of the process, and developmental dynamisms which control the 'positive' rebuilding, based on the developing Personality Ideal. However, dynamisms are not transformative on their own, and are tied to, and part of, the positive disintegrative process. As with all human responses, the dynamisms can also be mapped to each level of development. The presence or absence of these dynamisms also help identify the developmental level of an associated behavior. For example, Dąbrowski lists syntony and empathy as two developmental dynamisms. Syntony is not a word that regularly appears in contemporary usage, however Dąbrowski (1970, p. 2) compared it to "the gregarious instinct in animals." On the Syntonic Continuum (Harper & Clifford, 2019), syntony is a low level response from which a higher level 'empathy' emerges. Syntony is associated with a 'herd mentality', tinged with a 'survival of the fittest' approach at Level I. Empathy represents a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of others' situations, and begins to emerge in the latter part of Level III. Importantly, Dąbrowski (1996, p. 70) states:

> Growth of empathy is one of the most powerful developmental dynamics and one which most clearly shows the progressive and hard won change from narrow egocentrism to an all-encompassing universal love. Empathy grows out of the strong emotions of search for the meaning of life and finding it in concern and service to others, and out of the need for self-perfection as a human being. Self-

> perfection is not possible in a vacuum but…grows out of conflicts with oneself which produce an increase in caring and appreciation of other, and a deeper humility within oneself.

Consider again the list of 8 young role models presented by Sternberg in his chapter in this book. Their actions are the epitome of empathy at the highest levels demonstrating Emotional OE. Again, their IQ is not important, however I would argue that their Intellectual OE and Emotional OE most definitely are relevant and contribute to their continued authentic development. The characteristics Dąbrowski describes for empathy are exactly those we would wish to harness in transformationally gifted learners, and as such we can use these characteristics, along with those associated with higher level overexcitabilities, to identify transformationally gifted learners.

Linking Dąbrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration to Wisdom

As previously noted, additional qualities beyond knowledge, intelligence, and power are required to make the world a better place. The construct of wisdom, however, may provide this missing link. The capacity to identify people with the potential to develop wisdom, and to enhance, support, and encourage that potential, may allow us to help influence the shape of the world's future. The notion that wisdom requires more than IQ is consistent with the TPD:

> Authentic wisdom involves more than intellectual knowledge. It presupposes developmental transformations of the emotional and instinctive structure of a human person. It has to draw from empathic insights and deep emotional, imaginational and intuitive resources. It has to spring from the drama of personal development and distressing experiences of the process of positive disintegration. (Kawczak, 1970, p. 16)

So, the Polyhedron Model of Wisdom (Karami et al., 2020) brings together seven components of wisdom as identified through the previously-mentioned systematic review, Dąbrowski's TPD also describes wisdom as a higher order condition for attaining the Personality Ideal. The following table demonstrates the relationships between the TPD and the Polyhedron Model of Wisdom (PMW) (Table 11.3).

Table 11.3 Examples of touchpoints between the Theory of Positive Disintegration and the Polyhedron Model of Wisdom

PMW component	Examples of TPD touchpoints
1. Knowledge management	• Aligns closely with the higher-level manifestations of Intellectual OE • Links to the developmental dynamism 'education-of-oneself' that may appear in Level III, but is most active and relevant in Level IV Conclusion: Altruistic motivation will be a driver of individuals displaying Intellectual OE characteristics at Level III and Level IV. They will be keen for new knowledge, and understand its appropriate application, but this will not be undertaken for egocentric reasons, so people displaying these characteristics may also achieve the 'Knowledge Management' component of the PMW.
2. Self-regulation	• Both emotional-regulation and self-regulation, as mentioned in the PMW, require the capacity for self-reflection, which is an integral process within the TPD. Importantly, the PMW specifies that the capacity for reflecting on one's life is integral to the 'Self-Regulation' component. Conclusion: The elements within the 'Self-Regulation' component align extremely closely to the notion of 'subject-object in oneself' from the TPD, and are also tied to the development of empathy. Through this scrutiny and desire to be a better version of one's self comes an increased understanding of others. These characteristics appear as an individual moves from Level III and into Level IV of the TDP and suggest achievement of the 'Self-Regulation' component of the PMW.
3. Altruism and moral maturity	• The behaviors and emotional responses described by Karami et al. (2020), along with the construct of empathy, are particularly significant within the TPD. • Level IV is also a significant level for the emergence of true altruistic tendencies. Prior to this any glimmer of altruistic behavior is clouded by personal gain, and only in Level III is there the beginning of a preparedness toward self-sacrifice. • People functioning at Level III or higher of the TPD will demonstrate behaviors that step away from mindless acceptance of societal norms. Conclusion: Individuals who are demonstrating considered ethical behaviors, true empathy, and active contributions toward the common good without personal reward, within a community, region, nation, or globally, are therefore likely to be functioning at Level III or IV of Dąbrowski's TPD. They may also achieve the 'Altruism and moral maturity' component of the PMW, traits which align with the descriptions of transformationally gifted people.

(*continued*)

Table 11.3 (continued)

PMW component	Examples of TPD touchpoints
4. Openness and tolerance	• This underlying sentiment is echoed in Dąbrowski's TPD through identification with others, and the emergence of true empathy in the latter part of Level III and maturing into Level IV. A cognitive and conscious desire to know and understand others (Dąbrowski, 1996; Mendaglio, 2008a) is fundamental to identification, as it emerges in the higher levels of development, • Dąbrowski (1996, pp. 36–37) gives importance to a "growth of understanding and of feeling for others…and genuine acceptance of others as unique persons". As a person transitions from Level IV to V there is a development of empathy for everything that exists along with an altruistic attitude toward all people (Mendaglio, 2008a). • Dąbrowski is clear that, as an individual develops toward the Personality Ideal, they move completely away from an unthinking adoption of societal norms (their own or those of others) and "there is no reason to put on an equal foot the opposite conceptions of what is right and what is wrong" (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. xi), as the mindless acceptance of another's values can, at worst, lead to mass murder, or even genocide. Conclusion: Whilst the nuances of expression may differ slightly between the PMW and the TPD in this component, there is a fundamental respect for the value of humanity. Empathy and identification come to the fore as an individual moves through Level III and into Level IV of the TPD, and people displaying these behaviors may also achieve the 'Openness and tolerance' component of the PMW.
5. Sound judgement and decision making	• The consideration of 'what is' versus 'what ought to be' is also at the core of the personal decision-making that underpins Dąbrowski's TPD, and reflects the volitional choices that an individual makes as part of the formation of the Personality Ideal. This process must be guided by sound judgement and decision making. Conclusion: The internal struggles and conflicts that epitomize the developmental transitions within the TPD are crucial when moving from integration to disintegration, and unilevel to multilevel experiencing (Dąbrowski, 1996). Therefore, people who achieve the higher developmental levels of the TPD must also engage sound judgement and decision making and may, therefore, also achieve this component of the PMW.

(*continued*)

Table 11.3 (continued)

PMW component	Examples of TPD touchpoints
6. Intelligence and creative thinking	• Intelligence and creative thinking are both also significant concepts for Dąbrowski (1964, p. 114), who defines creativity as "the ability for, and realization of, new and original approaches to reality. It is expressed in the new formulation of issues and in original productions arising from unique interrelationships" between the internal mind, imagination, and the stimuli of the external world. • As with all human expressions and responses viewed through the lens of Dąbrowski's TPD, creativity is also expressed as a multilevel construct, meaning that it will manifest in a qualitatively different way depending on the level of development attained by the individual at a given time. At Level II, the experience of creativity is impulsive and spontaneous, and lacking in discrimination and evaluation. Once an individual moves to Level III, however, a hierarchy of values is evident in the creative process and output, allowing for creativity to "express the drama and tragedy, even agony, of human existence…[whilst being] a manifestation of the conjugation of emotional, imaginational and intellectual overexcitability" (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 36). At more advanced levels of the TPD, individuals may exhibit rich creativity, along with significant intellectual and emotional characteristics. • Consideration of Intellectual OE aligns well with the construct of intelligence as defined in the WICS Model of leadership (Sternberg, 2005a, 2005b) where wisdom, intelligence and creativity are brought together in a synthesized whole. Sternberg describes traits and attitudes that resonate with the higher levels of Dąbrowski's TPD. • Dąbrowski elaborates further that those individuals experiencing intellectual overexcitability will also have an enthusiasm and reverence for knowledge and logic, and be able to think in abstract and theoretical modes. Conclusion: Again, the place of creativity, and Intellectual Overexcitability within Dąbrowski's TPD is synchronous with the findings of the systematic review underpinning the PMW and thus, people who achieve Dąbrowski's higher levels of development may indeed also meet the 'Intelligence and creative thinking' component of the PMW.

(*continued*)

Table 11.3 (continued)

PMW component	Examples of TPD touchpoints
7. Dynamic balance and synthesis translated into action	• At the very core of the process of positive disintegration are growth, change, development, reflection, and transformation. Nothing about positive disintegration is static. Dąbrowski goes to great lengths throughout all his writings, but particularly in *Multilevelness of Emotional Functions* (Dąbrowski, 1996) and *The Dynamics of Concepts* (Dąbrowski, 1973), to depict the perpetual motion of the development process, especially from Level III, where multilevelness becomes more apparent. Indeed, Dąbrowski (1996, p. 38) refers to Level IV as a "developmental synthesis." Evidence of emerging wisdom does not appear until Level III or beyond. Conclusion: Wisdom is a synthesis of what has gone before, the culmination of the struggle between 'what is' and 'what ought to be', in the development toward the Personality Ideal. This translates into the action of the new, emerged person who lives with humility, and who puts others, and the greater good, before themselves.

How Does This Relate to Learners Who Are Transformationally Gifted?

When considering the gifted-education context, particularly in defining transformational giftedness, Sternberg (2019, 2020a, 2020b) focuses on action: the real and tangible way a transformationally gifted person might make a positive and transformative difference. Having compared the differences between transactional and transformational giftedness, we can further subdivide transformational giftedness into self-transformational giftedness, where transformation relates to oneself, and other-transformational giftedness that is outwards-focussed. As other-transformational giftedness emerges, the individual may make "a positive, meaningful, and possibly enduring difference to the world" (Sternberg et al., 2021, p. 4). This transformational process also mirrors the processes previously described within Dąbrowski's TPD, whereby self-transformation occurs through the disintegration and reintegration processes of Levels II and III. As the Personality Ideal and hierarchy of values emerges in Level III and Level IV, the individual is equipped to make a more altruistically-based contribution to the world. The process of transformation is at the very core of Dąbrowski's TPD, along with the importance of tangible action and the "ability to effect its realization" (Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 9).

In order to support the formation of transformational giftedness, it would be helpful for all educators, including those of the gifted, to have an understanding of the intersection of the TPD and the PMW, and the relevant literature. This knowledge becomes a powerful tool in the identification of learners with the potential to be transformationally gifted, as they develop ethical, authentic wisdom and strive toward their own Personality Ideal. If the experiences associated with Dąbrowski's TPD were identified, supported, and nurtured, where inner turmoil is not automatically seen as a negative or problematic emotion, but as a pathway to a higher level of development, we as educators may then in turn, see those individuals blossom toward their full potential as transformationally gifted young people. In this way we would contribute to a more just, creative, and meaningful world in which there are more people equipped with the capacities to appreciate, identify, and solve the problems facing humanity and the planet.

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