

# Implications of Postmodern Curriculum Theory for the Education of the Talented

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*Postmodern curriculum theory provides a framework for educators of the gifted and talented to critique the assumptions of the field from within the field. Five overarching themes derived from postmodern literature are discussed. These are presence, origin, unity, denial of transcendence, and constitutive otherness. Five issues are subsumed beneath the themes. These are issues of discourse, the body, the canon, gender, and power and class.*

*Modern visions of education as characterized by the Tylerian rationale, behavioral lesson plans, context-free objectives, competitive and external evaluation, dualistic models that separate teacher and student, meaning and context, subjective persons and objective knowledge, body and spirit, learning and environment, and models of linear progress through value-neutral information transmission are no longer acceptable in the postmodern era.*

—Patrick Slattery (1995b, p. 612)—

*A postmodern world will involve postmodern persons, with a postmodern spirituality, on the one hand, and a postmodern society, ultimately a postmodern global order, on the other. Going beyond the modern world will involve transcending its individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanization, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism. Constructive postmodern thought provides support for the ecology, peace, feminist, and other emancipatory movements of our time, while stressing that the inclusive emancipation must be from modernity itself.*

—David Ray Griffin (1993, pp. viii-ix)—

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*Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. Vol. 22, No. 4, 1999, pp. 324-353. Copyright ©1999 The Association for the Gifted, Reston, VA 20191-1589.

## Introduction

In 1994, Margolin and Sapon-Shevin, in two books critical of the field of gifted education, wondered about the reality of a giftedness construct. Margolin, a social worker, and Sapon-Shevin, a special educator, critics from outside the field, believe that gifted and talented education benefits the privileged classes. Along with many others within the field, they also believe that giftedness is not absolute, the results of a test score, but that giftedness is a socially constructed phenomenon.

In 1996, in a special issue of *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, Borland asked the field to criticize itself in these areas:

1. Is there such a thing as a gifted child?
2. Is gifted education racist, sexist, and classist?
3. Is there a need for ability grouping?
4. Does gifted education interfere with community?
5. Is the field irrelevant?

(For other self-critical comments, see Callahan, 1996; Gallagher, 1996; Howley, Howley, & Pendarvis, 1995; Pendarvis & Howley, 1996.) These thinkers from within our field rightfully ask us to look hard at ourselves, but let me attempt to put these critiques into a theoretical framework.

In recent years, a group of educational foundations thinkers known as the curriculum reconceptualization movement (cf. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995) called for a rejection of the modernist conception of curriculum as a list of objectives, books, and concepts to be mastered according to the plan set down (and essentially unmodified since he set it down) by Ralph Tyler in 1949. Tyler's four goals for curriculum are essentially unchanged:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? (objectives)
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? (design)
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized? (scope and sequence)
4. How can we determine that these purposes are being attained? (evaluation)

The 1960s' civil rights movement, the opposition to the Vietnam War, and the development of the counterculture contributed to a rejection of curriculum as behaviorism—with its “observable” goals and objectives. The rejection of positivism and structuralism led to a crisis of meaning. Experiments in the “open classroom” and neoprogressivist calls to treasure childhood for its own sake resulted in an

emphasis on humanistic education with the stress on the affective and on the personal rather than the corporate and the patriotic.

Since the 1970s, the reconceptualization of curriculum has focused on the dangers of curriculum engineering, emphasizing a focus on freedom and aesthetics, with a call to tie curriculum not to technique but to the human spirit. The reconceptualists have urged educators not to conceive values as goals or objectives but to design an educational environment that values educational activity and to pursue a wider view of what educational activity is as well as to foster creativity. They have urged us to value the arts and humanities as well as the sciences and mathematics.

Parallel to the writing by the curriculum reconceptualists, in the 1980s, a move back to the political right focused curriculum on psychological stage theories of development with an emphasis on what learning was appropriate during various stages. In the 1990s, curriculum theorists, including the reconceptualists, showed a fascination for the socialist theory of Vygotsky and with the assessment emphasis of Gardner (1991, 1993). Higher order thinking became the emphasis at the same time as a call for going back to the basics. Recent studies, such as the TIMSS study comparing U.S. science and mathematics curriculum with Japanese and German curriculum, have noted that the U.S. curriculum is "a mile wide and an inch deep" (Peak et al., 1996, p. 3). The recent proficiency testing movement in many states has influenced what is taught as well. Again, these trends would seem to herald a more conservative trend in curriculum development.

The reconceptualists call for a move from a consideration of curriculum as a set of behavioral goals and objectives—that is, a consideration of curriculum development as a field of "design"—to a consideration of curriculum development from the point of view of *understanding* on a deep level what our in-school, out-of-school, conscious-, and unconscious-curriculum choices and predispositions mean (Slattery, 1995a, 1995b). As well-meaning educators of talented students, we need to continue to engage head-on the critiques of our field; our attitudes toward curriculum; and our ingrown biases, defensiveness, and prejudices. Postmodern curriculum reconceptualists and theorists provide a framework for doing so without resorting to personal attacks or finger pointing.

### *Gifted Education and Curriculum Theory*

Perhaps the questions this movement raises have been inadequately addressed by the field of the education of the talented.

Perhaps we have been so engaged in an effort to establish a foothold for special curriculum based on the deficit model of special education that we have focused on the trees and not on the forest. A historical look at curriculum for talented students must take into account the work of many scholars (Borland, 1989; Kaplan, 1986; Gallagher & Gallagher, 1995; Maker, 1982a, 1982b; Maker & Nielson, 1996a, 1996b; Renzulli & Reis, 1985; Tannenbaum, 1983, 1986; Van Tassel-Baska, 1988, 1994a, 1994b; Ward, 1961/1980).

All have had influence on development of thought about curriculum for the talented. All say that the main reason for the education of talented students is to provide a differentiated curriculum because the academically talented students learn differently, especially in rate and in ability to think abstractly. All emphasize that curriculum for the academically talented should be different in kind and in emphasis but not specifically in type. They call for a "defensible" curriculum that is differentiated. To my knowledge, they deal little, if at all, with the reconceptualist view of curriculum theory as described by Pinar, et al. (1995); although mentions of progressive educators, such as Bruner (Maker & Neilson, 1996a), and of teaching for creativity (Piiro, 1998a) are common.

Elliot Eisner in *The Educational Imagination* (1994) delineated five different orientations to curriculum. Most descriptions of curriculum orientations in gifted education speak of the content, process/product, and concept orientations (Maker, 1982a; Maker & Neilson, 1996b; Van Tassel-Baska, 1988, 1994a, 1994b). Eisner's orientations provide a convenient and comprehensive approach to thinking about curriculum for the talented. These are the five orientations according to Eisner:

1. Curriculum as personal relevance,
2. Curriculum as technology,
3. Curriculum as academic rationalism,
4. Curriculum as social adaptation and social reconstruction,  
and
5. Curriculum as the development of cognitive processes.

One's belief system informs what one thinks should be taught. Elsewhere I added two other orientations to curriculum that should be considered by curriculum theorists in the field of gifted education/talent development. These are

6. Teaching for insight and
7. Postmodernist (Piiro, 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 1999).

(One could argue that teaching for insight is subsumed under Eisner's "curriculum as the development of cognitive processes"; but, given the recent push in schools for a multiple intelligences

approach to curriculum brought on by the Project Zero research [Gardner, 1993], I have made it a separate category.) Curriculum should be considered within the explicit context of one's (usually implicitly believed and unexamined) curriculum orientations. Table 1 indicates how curriculum thinkers in the field of the education of the gifted and talented might be categorized according to the seven delineations (Eisner's five, Project Zero's teaching for insight [Gardner, 1991, 1993], and the postmodernist).

### *What Are Modernism and Postmodernism?*

Before discussing the issues that are the subject of this paper, let us frame the argument historically (Cahoone, 1996; Greene, 1986). What modernism is depends about which domain one is talking and the shift one is discussing. In religion, some say that modernism began with the Protestant reformation in the 16th century, which signaled a repudiation of the traditional authority of the Roman Catholic church and the cultivation of incredulity by such thinkers as Montaigne or Erasmus. Some say that modernism began in the 17th century with the scientific reformation signaled by the works of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton. Some say that modernism began in the 18th century with the republican rebellions in France and the United States. Some say it began with the industrial revolution in Europe in the 19th century. Whatever the preference for its beginning, the age of modernity denoted a sea change in the way humans lived their lives.

Likewise, the arts from 1850 to 1950 showed extraordinary inquiry into form and structure that reflected the changes in religion, politics, science, and technology. While one could go on and on with examples, a few may suffice to give the flavor of the changes wrought during that century: in visual arts, Klimt's art nouveau and the Vienna Secession, Cassatt's impressionism, Van Gogh's expressionism, Picasso's cubism, de Kooning's abstract expressionism; in fiction, the stream of consciousness narration of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, the idealized masculinity of Hemingway and London, the exploration of the dark side of the self by Conrad and Melville, and the muck-raking of Sinclair; in poetry, the solipsistic existentialism of T. S. Eliot, the nonreferential musing of Stevens, and the breath lines of William Carlos Williams; in music, with the 12-tone scale of Schönberg, the restless experimentation of Mahler, the crowd-shocking chord structures of Stravinsky, and the eerie Nordic calm of Sibelius; in architecture, with the Bauhaus' group led by Gropius who invented the International Style and the Arts

**Table 1**  
**Seven Orientations to Curriculum in the Field of the Education of the Gifted and Talented**

Orientation	Model (or aspects of model)	Relevant Quote
1. Curriculum as personal relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renzulli's Enrichment Triad</li> </ul>	<p>Building educational experiences around student interests is probably one of the most recognizable ways in which school-wide enrichment programs differ from the regular curriculum. (Renzulli &amp; Reis, 1989, p. 230)</p>
2. Curriculum as technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maker's Problem Type Matrix</li> <li>• Van Tassel-Baska's various matrices</li> <li>• Tannenbaum's Enrichment Matrix</li> </ul>	<p>Use boxes 1-5 to indicate results; check appropriate box if mastered (use other codes as needed, i.e.: "N"-not appropriate, "A"-absent, "1/2" achieved at least 1/2 mastery." (Kemnitz, Martin, Hegeman, &amp; Hickey, 1982, p. 15)</p>
3. Curriculum as academic rationalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• William and Mary Language Arts and Science Models</li> <li>• Van Tassel-Baska's "Integrated Curriculum Model"</li> <li>• Talent Search Curricula</li> </ul>	<p>Most of the outcomes that have been officially defined are lacking in specific academic content. This vagueness about content is a continued evasion of our collective responsibility to provide academic guidance. To be genuinely useful, outcomes-based guidelines should spell out . . . by clearly defined grade-by-grade content guidelines for at least fifty percent of the curriculum. (Hirsch, 1993, p. 1)</p>

4. Curriculum as  
 (a) social adaptation and  
 (b) social reconstruction
- (a) Javits grant authorization
  - (b) Postmodern curriculum thinking
- (a) Javits legislation reauthorization "targets grants to schoolwide efforts to provide challenging curricula and enriching instruction (often offered in gifted and talented program) to all students; at least half of the grants will go to high poverty schools" (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title IV, Part B, 1988).
- (b) An issue of power is who decides? Who decides what learners will learn and what teachers will teach? Does the Advanced Placement Company decide? Does the International Baccalaureate Company decide? (Purto, 1999, p. 407)
5. Curriculum as the development of cognitive processes
- Project Zero's "Teaching to Understand"
  - Sternberg's "Componential Model"
  - Taylor's "Multi-Talent Totem Pole"
  - Maker's "DISCOVER Problem-Solving"
  - Meeker's SOI
  - Betts' "Autonomous Learner Model"
  - Van Tassel-Baska's "Integrated Curriculum Model"
- The student will develop Divergent Thinking Processes
    1. The student will develop fluency.
    2. The student will develop flexibility.
    3. The student will develop originality.
    4. The student will develop elaboration. (Ohio Gifted Student Course of Study, 1989, p. 11)
  - The essence of the DISCOVER assessment process is that the children engage in problem-solving activities in their regular classroom setting . . . they use materials that are novel, fun, and versatile,

and they interact with their peers while a trained observer records their problem-solving behaviors and describes their products. (Maker, Nielson, & Rogers, 1994, p. 9)

Understandings can only be apprehended and appreciated if they are performed by a student . . . students need to begin to “practice” these performances from the first day of class. (Gardner, 1993, p. 191)

Many of the common recommendations for curricula for the academically and artistically talented were indeed postmodern: (1) pre-assessment for individualization; (2) development of student interests; (3) autobiography used to reconceptualize; (4) time as a variable; (5) talent development based on specific talents. (Piiro, 1998b, p. 132)

- Project Zero’s Teaching for Understanding (Gardner, 1991)

- State-organized education is an attempt to create what we have repressed in ourselves. But this act is an act of violence (Block, 1997, p. 162).

6. Curriculum as a Means of Producing Insight

7. Curriculum Based on Contemporary Postmodern Curriculum Thought

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Note. From *Talented Children and Adults: Their Development and Education* (2nd ed.), by J. Piiro, 1999, Columbus, OH: Prentice-Hall. Reprinted with permission.

and Craft style of unornamented buildings based on the premise that modern art and architecture must be responsive to the needs and influences of the modern industrial world and that good designs must pass the test of both aesthetic standards and sound engineering; in theater with the agonizing and searing plays of Tennessee Williams, the socialist thought of Brecht, and the probing family confessions of Eugene O'Neill; and in film, with the incorporation of ever more sophisticated voice, music, and technology to the simple, flickering images of the "movie."

*Postmodern* was a term first used in 1917 by Rudolf Pannwitz, a German philosopher, who used it to speak of the nihilism of 20th-century culture when he used the word (Cahoone, 1996). The word does not appear in either the 1971 *Oxford English Dictionary* or the 1982 *American Heritage Dictionary*. It was used in 1934 by a Spanish literary critic, Federico de Onis; in 1939 by theologian Bernard Iddings Bell, who used it to signal a return to traditional religion; and by historian Arnold Toynbee to describe the rise of mass society after World War I. The term *postmodern* was widely used in the 1950s and 1960s in literary criticism to describe the backlash to artistic modernism. Architectural critics began to use the term in the 1970s.

In the 1980s, the term was widely used to refer to poststructuralist philosophy, especially to the work of French thinkers Foucault (1971/1972, 1972–1977/1980), Derrida (1967/1974), Deleuze and Guattari (1976/1977), and Lyotard (1992). These young philosophers, influenced by the linguist structuralist de Saussure (1928/1966) and by the anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1958/1972), rejected the existentialism of Sartre (1943/1956; 1960/1991), the focus on the self of Freud (1874–1938/1938), and the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1962), and embraced new versions of Marxism after the Stalinist horrors were revealed by writers such as Solzhenitzyn. These new versions of Marxism were propounded by themselves and after the Frankfurt School, an institute for social research in Germany that exported such midcentury thinkers, exiles from Nazi Germany, as Fromm (1941), Arendt (1958) and Marcuse (1964). Habermas (1971/1972), in his analysis of the forms of knowledge, was also influential. They had a great influence on postmodern thought.

These young thinkers, who took part in the worldwide student riots of the late 1960s, rejected the idea that the self is knowable, or even central to existence. They also rejected the idea that the social sciences should focus on studying supra-individual *structures*, such as discourse, ceremony, and familial and tribal attachments, because they believed that to find such a transcendent concept as empirical truth through such study of structures was scientifically

impossible. They were thus called *poststructuralists*, meaning that they rejected the idea that truth is universal and that innate in the mind is a common structure called a *self*. In fact, they questioned whether the methods of so-called "objective" science (or *positivism*) could avoid being self-referential and, thus, falsely self-reflexive. They rejected *essentialism*, the belief that there is a fundamental human or racial nature determined by biology, in favor of more paradoxical and complex explanations. Their thought was considered radical as they questioned whether there could be such a thing as *rational inquiry*, *detached truth*, a *single self*, an *objective meaning*. The term *postmodern* has been more widely used than *poststructural*; and that is the term I choose to use here, replicating its usage by the U.S. curriculum theorists (cf. Pinar et al., 1995; Pinar & Reynolds, 1992; Slattery, 1995a, 1995b).

Postmodern curriculum theorists would seem to fall into the category of what Eisner (1994) called the "Social Reconstruction" orientation to curriculum. Postmodernism in education typically criticizes *grand narratives* as explanations for the way things are (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996). Grand narratives are explanations that have been accepted unconsciously by most people. Grand narratives in the field of gifted education would have to do with such commonly held beliefs by educators as giftedness exists and can be identified by a test score; that giftedness is good; that education of the gifted and talented should be the training of intellectuals; that gifted students should have a chance to go to colleges that will help them change their social class; that certain curricular practices, such as grouping or cooperative learning, are or are not effective with gifted students; and that the school system is resistant, unfriendly, or discriminatory against gifted students. These and other grand narrative-related beliefs are seldom questioned by practitioners in the field.

Postmodernism has been shown to have five overarching themes (Cahoone, 1996). These take the form of the types of critiques offered (see Table 2). Elsewhere, I have spoken about 12 issues that seem obvious to me after my reading and thinking about what the postmodern critique offers the field of gifted education (Piiro, 1997b, 1998c, 1998d, 1998e, 1998f, 1999; [www.ashland.edu/~jpiiirto](http://www.ashland.edu/~jpiiirto)). These were issues of time, power and class, the body, the spirit, the canon, justice, diversity, language, discourse, desire and passion, gender, and imagination. These are not inclusive and are perhaps idiosyncratic. Only five of these will be discussed in this paper: issues of discourse, of the body, of the canon, of gender, and of power and class.

Table 2

## Overarching themes\* with their subsumed issues

I. Theme of Presence	II. Theme of Origin	III. Theme of Unity	IV. Theme of Denial of Transcendence	V. Theme of Constitutive Otherness
1. Issues of discourse	2. Issues of the body	3. Issues of the canon 4. Issues of gender	5. Issues of power and class	All

\*Cahoone, 1996.

The first theme is that postmodernism criticizes *presence*, that is, the idea that anything is really there, really exists, or can be directly apprehended if it does exist. "Postmodernism . . . denies that anything is 'immediately present' hence independent of signs, language, interpretation, disagreement" (Cahoone, 1996, p. 14). This relates to the question posed by Margolin (1994): Is there such a thing as a gifted child? Is giftedness a social construction or an absolute? The first issue, that of *discourse*, would be subsumed under this overarching theme.

The second overarching theme among postmodern thinkers is the critique of *origin*. "Inquiry into origin is an attempt to see behind or beyond phenomena to their ultimate foundation" (Cahoone, 1996, p. 14). Postmodernists often deny that there is a inherent truth behind phenomena; this theme will be discussed with the issue of the *body*.

The third overarching theme is the critique of *unity*. Postmodern thought attempts to argue that what has been thought of as one, a unity, will ultimately be shown to be many. "For example, a text can be read in an indefinitely large number of ways, none of which provides the complete or true meaning" (Cahoone, 1996, p. 15). This theme reflects the structuralist origins of some postmodern thought; the structuralist philosophers argued that since culture is made of relations, the existence of the self must be plural: the selves. Issues of the *canon* and of *gender* subsume themselves beneath this theme.

A fourth overarching theme found in most postmodern thought is a denial of *transcendence*:

Where most philosophers might use the idea of justice to judge a social order, postmodernism regards that idea as itself the

product of the social relations that it serves to judge; that is, the idea was created at a certain time and place, to serve certain interests, and is dependent on a certain intellectual and social context. (Cahoone, 1996, p. 15)

Norms do not exist. For example, exactly what *is* truth, what *is* goodness, what *is* beauty, what *is* love? This theme brings forth from the critics of postmodernism accusations of relativism and of nihilism. Issues of power and class are collected under this theme.

An application of these four themes of postmodernism is *constitutive otherness* (Cahoone, 1996). What contains also excludes. "What appear to be cultural units—human beings, words, meanings, ideas, philosophical systems, social organizations—are maintained in their apparent unity only through an active process of exclusion, opposition, and hierarchization" (Cahoone, 1996, p. 16). If someone is in a group, he is also out of other groups. Postmodern educational scholars examine social systems by attention to the margins, to the borderland, to the outsiders (Giroux, 1992, 1997; McLaren, 1995). They examine privilege with reference to lack of privilege. The existence of the other, she who is not me, becomes a subject for conjecture. The idea is that we maintain our societal groups through repression of the other.

## Five Themes and Five Issues

The following will be a brief indication of each of the themes and the five issues mentioned above. Space does not permit a fuller explanation; however, each of the themes and the issues is related in this discussion to specific practices and beliefs in the field of gifted education. So as not to indict the field, no names of educators in the field of gifted education are used, but the issues themselves are described in the spirit of engaging in scholarly discourse and not in imputation.

### I. PRESENCE

#### 1. *Issues of discourse*

The levels of discussion or the focus of discussion of educational reform in our field have been defensive at worst, and conciliatory at best. One common argument in the field of the education of the gifted and talented says that the nation is at risk and that properly educating our bright students will save the nation. This argument has been used since the publication of the Marland (1971) report,

which evoked national interests to argue for the special education of the gifted. Bright students have even been called "national resources" by educators of the gifted. One wonders what people whose children aren't so bright think about such talk. Are their children not national resources also? Educational discourse is much more complicated than the latest model or strategy with lines and diagrams within a bound curriculum guide, whether the curriculum is interdisciplinary, thematic, or whatever.

That we think we pose or solve a problem when we discuss it, and when we think that problems have solutions, is naive. Luke (1995–1996), in a discussion of the new research in educational discourse in and out of the classroom, noted that every time we make a judgment about a textbook, about the truth of an argument, about the validity of information in a text, we are making a context-bound analysis of discourse. "Critical discourse analysis is, ultimately, a normative enterprise in which one pays one's metaphoric money and takes one's political chances" (p. 8).

Several curriculum models in the field of the education of the gifted and talented emphasize problem solving and others emphasize problem finding. In thinking about problems to solve or to find, perhaps we as teachers of the talented could pose questions in this vein: What about this problem or curriculum model have we unconsciously accepted? What have we unconsciously rejected? What are the hidden features in the models we adopt? What are the ways we are compliant, complicit, or blind? All discourse has its hidden, implicit assumptions. Problems "solved" are few. The analysis of the process might reveal where unconscious processes take over, if only for a moment, and where they direct the assumptions that the problem is "solved."

Many of the conversations held between the students and the text are seen in their faces, bodies, and questions at home and outside of school and not in their test scores and products judged according to a rubric. Does the knowledge demonstrated in informal settings matter even though we cannot measure it? Yes. Selection of curriculum materials, modes of encountering the material, and valuing of the material necessarily involves decisions that entail a knowledge of consequences, implied and spoken.

Perhaps too many of the curriculum developers and practitioners in the field of the education of the gifted and talented seek quick fixes, a lesson to do on Monday morning, without engagement in the two critical issues of curriculum: (a) What shall we teach the talented and gifted? (b) For what purpose? Much of the discourse analysis literature concerns children who have trouble in school because

of their cultural difference from what the school expects. Researchers in the field of the education of the talented could also conduct discourse analysis research of the “good” kids, as Margolin (1994) called them. This research could shed light on cultural likeness and on resiliency.

Other matters of discourse in the field of the education of the gifted and talented have to do with talent development and gifted education (terminology), the development of expertise (process), historical definitions of giftedness (Marland, 1971, definitions, IQ definitions, domain definitions), assessment (authentic, test-driven identification), and such.

## *II. Origin*

### *2. Issues of the body.*

In our field, we call for the life of the mind. Yet cultural critics, multiple intelligencists, and special educators have begun to emphasize that there are many more ways of learning than intellectual ways—that learning gets into the “intellect” through bodily means. “Identity is lived before it is taught” (Grumet & Macedo, 1996, p. 17). Magda Lewis (Lewis & Macedo, 1996) noted, “The body of knowledge that is the curriculum and the body experience of being schooled—learning to be still and be quiet—are not separate from each other in the process of education” (p. 33). Gifted students, the students on whom we focus, are known as “good” (Margolin, 1994) because they obey; they are curious and witty and have good memories; they are crowned with haloes by adults; they sit politely in classes, helping the slower students without making a fuss; and, as such, they may not receive the attention they deserve as frazzled teachers wrestle with the troublemakers or the physically active students. Some bright young students are branded with labels of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and subsequently drugged for their bodily, physical activity while learning.

On still another level, current pedagogical wisdom advocates that teachers subsume their essential teaching selves from “teacher as interpreter” to “teacher as manager.” In my state (Ohio) and in others (e.g., Georgia), the model of intervention/facilitation/inclusion specialist that is beginning to dominate how the gifted and talented are taught may mitigate against a close, human relationship between teacher and student. Teaching as “performance” is a bodily act, an act of love and spontaneity. Teachers as “facilitators” may not be able to create the relationships with each individual student that make teaching a theatrical reaching out and coming back. The

facilitation model may dehumanize the teacher of the talented such that the teacher becomes a function and not a person. Teaching is an act of passion and engagement with certain, specific children—"my kids," "my class." On the other hand, the model may encourage such relationships as well.

The picture of the teacher who gains emotional validation in our popular movies, is of the teacher leaping on the desk in *Dead Poets Society* (Weir, 1989), or the socially engaged and innovative inner city teacher in *Dangerous Minds* (Simpson, Bruckheimer, & Smith, 1995). This is the teacher who grabs our minds and emotions. That is the teacher we seek to be. Yet, we teacher educators seem to be wanting to train teachers who resemble the character of Ditto in the movie *Teachers* (Hiller, 1984) in our emphasis on teacher as "guide." (Ditto was a teacher who had the students fill out dittoed worksheets while he sat in the back of the classroom and read the newspaper.)

When we teach as performers, we bewitch our students; and they bewitch us. I, as a teacher, am an artist, a dancer; I can change focus from moment to moment; I can read the temperature and mood of my class; I can speak up and say something to make that sleeping student in the back sit up and participate; I can "cover" the material or not, as the moment suits me; every moment of every day in my classroom I am tripping the light fantastic. I am not a "facilitator," a "guide on the side." I am a partner in my students' learning.

bell hooks (1994) noted that the more intellectual the teacher, the more he or she is permitted to deny the body, to be just a mind up there, immobile, behind the desk or podium in front of the class or lecture hall, proclaiming and personifying the "body" of knowledge he or she holds in the "mind." hooks thinks that part of the separation of social classes has to do with how little or how much one uses the body. "When the teacher walks out from behind the desk or podium the body becomes engaged with the student body" (p. 139). hooks made the provocative statement that "The person who is most powerful has the privilege of denying their body" (p. 137). That intellectual is viewed to hold knowledge in his mind, and no one questions what his body is doing while he is standing behind the podium or lectern, professing the contents of his mind from his lecture notes. No one cares that his tweed jacket smells of cigars or pipe tobacco, whether he is animate, or that he spends most of the time with his back to the students writing on the blackboard. The intellectuals who are most respected and perhaps viewed as being most powerful are those who profess at elite colleges. Those with the least respect, the least pay, and perhaps the least power, are the

early childhood (mostly female) teachers who must bend, twist, and be bodily and actively involved with their students—even though they have studied for several years, have college degrees (even doctoral degrees), and have trained themselves to be experts on young children.

However, such denial of the body may also be part of the lives of female teachers as well. On a recent evening, in a course called "Counseling and Creativity for the Talented," one third of the 24 female beginning teachers of the talented revealed, after reading Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* (1994), that they or their daughters had or are wrestling with eating disorders. If the experience of these professional, well-dressed, caring, and perfectionistic female teachers of the talented is any indication, these female teachers specifically, and women in general, still have not resolved the bodily issues raised by the visions of women in the mass media and by the consequences of being silenced and made to conform in their school days.

### III. UNITY

#### 3. *Issues of the canon.*

American critic Harold Bloom (1994) discussed the books he believes should be included in the canon. *Canon* is a religious term that has come to mean the inviolable course of study that students should read and discuss in order to become "educated." Mortimer Adler, Robert Hutchins, William Bennett, Diane Ravitch, and others have argued that some books have more value than others as materials to be studied in our classes. Postmodernists argue that popular culture should also be an academic concern. "Who reads must choose" (p. 15), Bloom said.

While these observations have been made by feminist and minority theorists, feminist critic Toril Moi (1985) noted that even feminist critics, who don't believe the curriculum should include only DWMs (Dead White Males), have a canon—and that is usually novels and poems by women writers of the 19th century. The underlying belief is that if students read "great works" by "great authors," they will become better and finer humans. The definition of "greatness" is that the version of life that has been conveyed in the work is authentic, real, and true. The reader views the work with respect and awe. The danger of using more recent works is that they may present experience that is less respectable for school purposes. Moi called them "those deviant, unrepresentative experiences discoverable in much female, ethnic and working-class writing" (p. 78). What is human is necessarily censored by one's choice of material

to include in the canon. The history that is conveyed through these works is most often a "whitewashed" history. This is convincingly demonstrated in books such as *Lies My Teacher Told* (Loewen, 1995), a book that deconstructs current history textbooks and the stories they tell.

Questions of what is the canon must particularly engage educators of the talented as their gifted students must take the tests that credential them for moving out of their towns, communities, and cultures to join the technocratic information producers. The question arises: What *are* the basics? Grumet (Grumet & Macedo, 1996) said, "In the name of the basics, relation, feeling, fantasy, anxiety, aggression, memory, irony are all banished" (p. 17). Texture and wonder is missing from many of these books; then, when students enter high school and college, they are relegated to "ancestry worship, oblivious to the world students actually live in and care about" (p. 17). Grumet said we have focused on ends rather than means.

The engagement of bright students in social criticism is not encouraged. Yet the very basis of the democratic ideal is that all people must participate in criticism and thought in order to make the decisions of the people. In history classes, students learn from textbooks and get into their minds the timelines and dates so that they can pass proficiency tests. Seldom are they taught critical history, that is, a historical view that critiques what the power structure has done, what decisions it has made. The 1990 Gulf War is never portrayed as "evil phallic posturing of insane men who have learned the lessons of their unexamined privilege well: the ritualized game of exclusion, violation, and obliteration of the many for the narcissistic pleasure of their own power to destroy" (Lewis & Macedo, 1996, p. 39).

Joanne Pagano, a highly educated social and educational foundationist, agreed: "The literary canon so jealously defended as source and sustenance of our highest and most noble aspirations is featured prominently in my educational history" (Pagano & Miller, 1996, p. 142). She appreciates and interacts with music, art, science, and mathematics; and she had high scores on both her SAT and her GRE. "And yet these seem not to have made me a better person" (p. 142). She wonders whether the current education debates will focus on "the sort of person education should produce. They are moral issues and not simply matters of skill and content. Our education ought to help us to be better persons" (p. 142). In many states, the outcomes that stated such were vehemently opposed by parents, who thought that the schools should not teach morals; the children's parents and churches should. Of course, a postmodern posi-

tion would be that one cannot teach without unconsciously infusing one's character into what is being taught.

These are old arguments; and, by now, many of us in the field of the education of the gifted and talented have made our own internal answers to these arguments. We may go along with Hirsch (1996), who argued that we must be able to talk with our grandparents, that educational theory has failed, that "skills" divorced from engaging content are useless skills, that the romantic principles on which these theories are based have been just that—well-taken, but too romantic—and that a democracy fails if there is not a shared body of knowledge that is conveyed to our students. Yet there remains a nagging doubt in the mind of this working-class girl.

Many critics of the canon are themselves privileged and conversant. Then they stipulate that the poor, the disenfranchised, the despairing do not have to be conversant in the canon. On the other hand, to deny a student's worth by ignoring that student's heritage in the name of the canon is also arrogant. As a child of the working class with all four of my degrees obtained at low-tuition state universities, I have, true to my calling as a teacher of literature, advocated a "core knowledge" curriculum. My reading in critical theory made me wonder how much have I devalued my own experiences as a child of a miner from a Finnish American culture in doing so. Why is my culture, its literature, and its regionality marginalized? Why did I aspire to be Holden Caulfield from the 1951 novel *Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, seeing the "phoniness" of the bourgeoisie, and not Daisy Miller, the naive and feckless American social-climbing character in a novel of the same name by Henry James (1915)?

#### 4. *Issues of gender.*

The studies of the American Association of University Women (1995) and of Sadker and Sadker (1995) led to the conclusion that the academically talented female is at risk. Such statements as the following by Magda Lewis (Lewis & Macedo, 1996) are common: "In the seventeen years of formal education that preceded my graduate studies I had not studied the history, culture, and political realities of women, of the labouring classes, of racial and ethnic minorities, of gays and lesbians" (p. 43). Pagano (Pagano & Miller, 1996) said, "As a student, I was exposed to all sorts of studies and '-ologies' that taught me, objectively and disinterestedly, against my own experience, that women are, in more ways than I can count, inferior" (p. 145).

Yet the issue of gender among the gifted and talented is more than this. The personality characteristic of androgyny is known to be present in talented creative producers. Androgyny is character-

ized by a flexibility whereby the genders take on similar personality characteristics: Women can be aggressive and men can be sensitive. The presence of androgyny as a personality attribute common to creative people is sometimes acknowledged (Barron, 1968; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Heilbrun, 1997; Piiro, 1998a, 1999; Piiro & Fraas, 1995).

Another gender issue has to do with same-sex attraction. Yet the presence of gay academically talented and creative students has received no attention in the literature of the field of the education of the talented; and the needs of these students for role models, approval, and humanness may not be addressed by educators in our field. We are only now beginning to acknowledge our shame in how we have ignored our talented gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (GLB). The 1997 World Conference and the 1997 National Association for Gifted Children conference posed a beginning as there were several sessions given by parents of gays and lesbians as well as by gay and lesbian teachers of the gifted and talented.

Issues of gender are seen in two other arenas. The push to engage girls in science and math has not been followed by a complementary push to engage boys in the arts and literature. This has led to a gender bias that favors scientific and mathematical discourse over aesthetic discourse. One could even say that there is a revulsion toward encouraging male participation in the arts, especially dance.

Further, the makeup of our field itself indicates gender issues. The overwhelming number of teachers of the gifted and talented are white women. The overwhelming number of coordinators of programs for the gifted and talented are white women. The lack of presence of men and of minorities must have an unforeseen and unconscious influence on the development and direction of this field. Are there solutions to this latter situation? Probably not, as recruitment of men and minorities seems to fail whenever we try. When we do attract men and minorities, they often shoot to the top of the field as we white women clamor to elect them to offices to indicate how equitable we are.

#### *IV. DENIAL OF TRANSCENDENCE*

##### *5. Issues of power and class.*

The critiques of our field, that we are educating students in the positivist paradigm to duly and without protest assume their roles in society, must be considered. As Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg said in Giroux (1997), "In a culture of positivism education becomes a form of social regulation that guides humans toward destinies that preserve the status quo" (p. x). How is power viewed

in certain school settings by men, women, children? Are our teachers aware of their complicity with the power structure, their docility in training students toward outcomes that may preclude self-examination? Giroux asked, "How can public school classroom teachers orient themselves to curriculum in a way that acknowledges the underlying ethical and normative dimensions that structure classroom decisions and experiences?" (p. 3).

The illusion of the rationality of the technocratic society pervades our field. While our goal as teachers and professors is to teach students that all beliefs are relative (i.e., to bring students to an appreciation of each other's beliefs and views of the world), the postmodern theorists insist that truth is not *relative* but *relational* (i.e., what is considered true depends on who is in power, on what is the student's and teacher's relation to that power, and on the *Zeitgeist*). In the past year, we have seen the Lutheran and Catholic churches of Europe apologize to the Jewish people for their silence during World War II. The churches had thought that if they kept quiet, the Jewish problem would go away. And it did—straight to the ovens. If we stay neutral, we support the power structure.

What do these comments have to do with the education of the gifted and talented? There is no such thing as neutrality, say liberation theorists, such as Macedo (Lewis & Macedo, 1996) and Freire (1996). This critique needs to be examined by those of us who educate academically talented students. Much of the rhetoric justifying the existence of an effort for special education for intellectually talented students is so they can "save the world" as "natural resources." Essentially, we are educating the students to assume roles of power and privilege. If someone has power, someone else does not; and when the subordinates accept their status as natural, inherent, destined, or random, oppression and power are securely entrenched.

*National Excellence* (1993) argues that international comparisons of test scores should drive the education of the outstandingly talented (i.e., their "quiet crisis" is that they do not score as high on tests as bright students in other countries). The federal government wrote this report and drives policy toward the achievement of domination by capitalist interests through manipulation of the education of the brightest students in the U.S. toward achievement on international tests (e.g., TIMSS, Peak et al., 1996; U.S. silence about Chinese policy toward Tibet). The justification for these practices is that the U.S. is "good," that our capitalist free enterprise system is good for the world, and that bright students should be educated to carry out its intrusions into other cultures. A one-sided, hegemonic view of power may influence bright students who may not be taught

to see U.S. policy in differing lights. For example, bright U.S. students may not be encouraged to read editorials in the foreign press. The power issue implicit in the 1998 bombing of Iraq was looked at quite differently by Indian editorial writers. One editorial stated,

The United States is one country that is not only not accustomed to speaking softly but takes pride in carrying the big stick with impunity. Turn to its record from World War II days and you will know what we mean. Dropping two lethal atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing 105,000 persons. The massacre of 1,000,000 North and South Vietnamese civilians from 1955 to 1975 as part of the titanic struggle against communism. The support extended to innumerable feudal and military dictatorships in West Asia and elsewhere. The embargo imposed on Cuba, the coup against the popularly-elected Marxist government of Allende in Chile; the invasion of the Caribbean nation of Grenada on October 21, 1983; the seizure of Panama in December 1989; and the conspiracy against the leftist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. And finally the continuing attacks on Iraq by a president whose own private and public conduct is not above reproach. (Husan, 1999, p. 10)

On the power issue of social class, hooks (1994) noted that when she, as a child of the working class, entered Stanford, she never encountered a professor who was from the working class. Her professors espoused classless values but were, themselves, members of the privileged classes. Most, or many teachers in public schools are from the working classes—many fathers, like mine, were staunch members of trade unions who sent us to college to fulfill a dream they themselves had. Educators of the gifted and talented still behave along lines where class counts. As teachers of the talented who view as their mission that they are training intellectuals, they, themselves, may have been taught to admire the intellectuals of the so-called “eastern establishment” more than the intellectuals in their own home towns. So it is no surprise that educators of the gifted and talented have complied with one of the implicit goals of the field—to move bright poor students into a higher social class.

When asked what is the purpose of a special education for the academically talented, many would say the purpose is to get them into a good college and help them to move social classes. They will rise above their parents, their culture, and their teachers from the working classes. This goal is seldom even questioned. What is left behind when one leaves one’s geographical place, one’s social class, one’s roots, to join the technocratic elite? Perhaps it is a sense of

family, continuity, closeness, belongingness, a relationship to grandparents, aunts, uncles, community ties, and family traditions. Leaving these behind is perhaps endemic to American culture because of its immigrant heritage (except for African Americans who were brought unwillingly and American Indians who were here already). Immigrant ancestors left all behind in the old countries to seek a better life in the new world; why should this risk-taking tradition not continue?

But what is the price of leaving home, family, tradition behind? Are these worth leaving in order to make more money and gain more intellectual respect? Perhaps yes and perhaps no. In a current study of creative writers, writers often asserted they had to leave their home place in order to be able to gain the distance required to write about it. Gifted adult writers, such as Ernest Gaines and Allan Gurganus, have said they had to leave the South in order to write about home; yet they also returned home after achieving successes in urban areas. Pulitzer Prize winner William Kennedy said, "Finally, I said, the hell with it, I'm going to write about Albany . . . I think I needed to be in San Juan to sufficiently fictionalize Albany as a place" (Pirto, in press).

Another issue of power may be how certain educators of the gifted and talented may have been silenced by a majority who propound current paradigmatic models in this field. For example, some teachers, administrators, and professors in the field of the education of the gifted and talented are practicing artist-educators who have difficulty with the limitations of the linear positivistic psychology-driven models presented by somewhat differently trained educators and psychologists in this field. They may find themselves stifling their own intuitive ways of knowing, their own instinctual questioning of positivistic models, fearing censure and ridicule if they seem disingenuous.

Another issue of power is who decides? Who decides what learners will learn and what teachers will teach? Does the Advanced Placement Company decide? Does the International Baccalaureate Company decide? Does the college English department decide? Teachers of advanced and honors classes often feel they have so much material to cover they cannot breathe, teach, or be free. They feel relegated to positions of curriculum delivery woman much as the milkman of yore. What is the power of the committees who choose what texts to teach and read?

Still another issue of power is that of the small, test-driven field of the education of the gifted and talented within the huge education establishment. The field has served as bellwether and has pio-

neered many teaching strategies and philosophies over the years. They have not received validation nor recognition for this and have pulled back into their shells, licked their wounds, and whimpered as they were accused of racism, classism, elitism, and test scorism by critics (Margolin, 1994; Sapon-Shevin, 1994). Some professors of the education of the gifted and talented slink in a cowardly manner down the halls of colleges of education. Yet they know they represent a field that has no money, no prestigious following, no government cachet, but that strives toward educating and serving the needs of students who do have learning needs that are different from those of other children. They feel powerless against the onslaught of the criticisms leveled against them. What is their recourse? Perhaps to just continue as they have been, to be the pioneers of an innovative educational practice that may begin as education for the talented but will soon be adopted as education for all. Or maybe the pedagogy of the powerless is not so powerless at all, given the clientele that can take a gem, a germ, a smidgen and expand, magnify, and extend.

#### V. CONSTITUTIVE OTHERNESS

Constitutive otherness engages many of the issues mentioned above, especially the issues of power, of discourse, of gender, of the body, and of the canon. Accusations and comments about the cognitive meritocracy that has been created by the sorting mechanisms in the school system have been propounded by Lasch (1995) and Herrnstein and Murray (1994). Kaplan and Kaplan (1997) wondered whether

we, in a world increasingly structured by technology and increasingly directed by the interests of the new elite, can create an order that respectfully includes people, whatever race they turn out to be, who are average or below average in intelligence. (p. 427)

Educators of the top 5% or 10% of students (the cognitive elite) seldom portray the world as a world where those who are capable of being symbolic analysts (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) are separated from their communities (the others) by frequent job relocation and by the walls of the gated communities in which they live, communicating with each other by e-mail, fax, and private carrier, traveling on airplanes. Perhaps such separation of the brightest from the "others" will create a population unable to criticize government and commerce. Perhaps, as Kaplan and Kaplan (1997) say, "America is

no longer a country that provides a lively democratic alternative to rule by an aristocracy. It is merely a country in which entry into the aristocracy is based on merit, rather than heredity" (p. 430).

Of course, many educators and parents of highly intelligent students would assert that these students are themselves treated like the "other" in their elementary and secondary schools, that they are discriminated against in both the classroom and in the curriculum. The postmodern conception of constitutive otherness can be a two-way street, as can the other issues discussed above. However, here at least, perhaps the discussion has been framed and the taboos against talking about them can be mentioned and found, maybe, to be straw.

### Conclusion

The field of the education of the gifted and talented has embraced curriculum models such as Creative Problem Solving, Future Problem Solving, and Problem-Based Learning. We were teaching critical thinking, higher order thinking, and creative-thinking processes before they became part of the regular curricula. Educators in the field advocated for Advanced Placement courses, the International Baccalaureate, Junior Great Books, brain-based thinking, thematic curriculum, interdisciplinary curriculum, and the like before regular education did. The innovations pioneered are seldom recognized. Now the postmodern curriculum theorists also go beyond the development and elaboration of curriculum models. They ask educators to engage in understanding *what* they are doing, *why* they are doing it, and *whether* they should continue to do it. This paper has briefly indicated some areas for thought that may be pertinent to the field of the education of the gifted and talented.

Perhaps this essay has been illuminating and will provoke discussion, debate, and more discourse. The postmodern curriculum theorists help us to look beneath the rug, to cut the pages stuck together, to peek into the dark places, and to slap away the cobwebs in order to question our field's grand narratives, our essentialist beliefs, and our taken-for-granted conditioned convictions. The Indian philosopher Krishnamurti (1974), in his discourses on education, urged teachers and students not to rely on their predispositions but to consider everything with fresh eyes. He differentiated between knowledge and intelligence, knowledge being what one acquires in order to get a degree and a job and intelligence being the

ability to see without prejudice. He asked: "Now that you are aware that you are conditioned, what next?" (p. 34). What next, indeed?

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