

Considering the DMGT: something old, something new

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We appreciate the opportunity to respond to Gagné's interesting paper. In a theory of such large scope, it is hard to know where to begin one's assessment. We have chosen to use Gagné's own criteria.

At the close of his paper, Gagné lists 'four characteristics of the DMGT that ... make [it] a very distinct and unique conception of giftedness and talent'. We will respond to his first two characteristics. The first is that 'the DMGT stands alone in its clearly differentiated definitions of the field's two key concepts'. Although we agree that there has been confusion in how the field defines its terms, it is not clear to us how the distinction Gagné makes between natural abilities and systematically developed skills (of which gifts and talents are merely subsets) differs from the more commonly used labels of aptitude and achievement. Natural abilities serve as the 'raw material' for systematically developed skills—just as aptitudes do for achievements. Aptitudes are therefore predictors of future achievement, as Gagné and most educational psychology textbooks would seem to agree (e.g., Sternberg & Williams, 2002; Woolfolk, 2004). This difference is readily understood, but not easily operationalized, because (a) the arrows of causation seem to run both ways between them; (b) developed skills in one arena may function more like aptitudes in others (e.g., alliterative and rhyming skills are both aptitudes that may serve as 'raw material' for poetry-writing creativity, but they are also skills that can be trained systematically; Baer, 1996); and (c) when one moves from theory to practice, it is often quite difficult to separate aptitudes and achievements (or natural abilities and developed skills) as neatly as we might wish. These problems and ambiguities are in no way resolved by giving new names to these otherwise familiar

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constructs, and thus we would argue that Gagné's model fails the first test it has set for itself.

Gagné's second criterion is that it is important to set prevalence estimates of giftedness and talent. Although setting the initial cut at 10 per cent seems completely arbitrary (Why not 8 per cent, or 5 per cent or 11 per cent?), the system of identifying many levels of giftedness has great potential value. As Winner (1996) pointed out so eloquently, extraordinarily gifted children have very different needs than other gifted children, who are the ones for whom most gifted education programmes are designed. Gagné's classification system makes the case that the difference between what he calls extremely gifted children (.001 per cent of the population) and the mildly gifted (10 per cent) is significantly greater than the difference between that mildly gifted group and average children. Indeed, as such scholars as Lubinski and colleagues have found, the extremely gifted can be studied and identified when in school—and go on to excel and achieve at much higher levels than others (Lubinski *et al.*, 2001). Gifted education needs to better recognize and provide worthy services for those children who truly stand out, even among the mildly and moderately gifted. We applaud the DMGT's attention to this concept.

References

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