Who Decides What Giftedness Is?

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Abstract

Who, rather than what, decides what giftedness is? The academic world traditionally focuses on theoretical descriptors whereas society as a whole is more interested in practical function. This partly divided focus is becoming increasingly critical and problematic as economies are becoming global and the political objective is to create a knowledge economy. High-achieving and creative individuals are becoming key individuals in making the emerging global economy possible. In the wake of this development follows a shift from theoretical understandings of giftedness to a focus on what the gifted and talented can actually do. There are therefore a number of deciding factors in defining what giftedness is: academic concerns and practical concerns as defined by society. Within each social group with various vested interests in high ability are individuals promoting and defending their own agenda for a number of reasons, prompted unaware by human nature. Whoever has dominance in any social context also reserves the right to definition of how to understand giftedness and talent irrespective of whether such a definition is scientifically right or wrong. In concluding the article, the current state of affairs in the light of the global superculture and its constituting knowledge economy is discussed.

***Keywords*:** Giftedness, talent, giftedness construct, dogmatism, human nature, aggression, knowledge monopoly, social function, global economy, knowledge economy, superculture, ethnic culture, human prospect.

Introduction

For this article I will embark on a complex and somewhat unusual task: I will attempt to explain *who*, rather than *what*, decides what giftedness is. While the void of consensus on definitions in gifted education has been addressed formidably by several learned colleagues (e.g., Dai, 2010; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius & Worrell, 2012), still lacking in theory, research, and in the general discourse is an interest in the dynamics and impact of social context. Also, theory and research tend to be generated in conspicuous *isolation*. We are well aware of the facts and ambitions of our chosen academic disciplines, but academics within these are often quite unaware—or even uninterested—in the facts and ambitions of other disciplines. Arising from such relative isolation is a void of understanding for the social dynamics by which labels, values, and theory in science, are generated.

One might argue that "giftedness" is entirely defined by scientific effort and hard-working objective researchers, ever keen on making progress and new discoveries. While this is perhaps how it ought to be, one must also consider what is a "scientific effort" and what *motivates* scientists to say what they say and do what they do? This is by no means as straightforward as one might think. I need only, as an example, mention the numbers of fraud and dishonesty in research increasing in direct proportion to the also increasing degree of industrialization and political control of the world of research (e.g., Bennich-Björkman, 2013; Lock, Wells & Farthing, 2001; Nocella, Best & McLaren, 2010; Widmalm, 2013). The history, sociology, and psychology, of science are domains of study that a majority of researchers rarely or never acquaint themselves with.

My aim with this article, therefore, is to provide context to the understanding of giftedness and gifted education in a way that will hopefully facilitate their further development and prompt a sustainable and more *realistic* understanding of these. I will focus on the following three issues:

First, *why are we at all mindful of the gifted*, which are the driving forces behind our interest?

Second, I will address the problem of *dogma and conflict* as well as *the denial of human nature*. Human behavior is relying on much more than the psychometric states and traits constituting so much of the basis for our current understanding of giftedness and talent.

Third, and also concluding the article, I will address a few aspects of *culture* in regard to the current and future state of gifted education.

Why are we mindful of the gifted and talented?

Why are we at all pursuing an understanding of giftedness, talent, and its education? There appear to exist a few main reasons. In a global perspective, I think that there is also emerging a priority order amongst these.

Increasingly important is the potential contribution of the gifted and talented to the global economy, which is why policy makers and the leaders of business and finance express a growing interest in gifted education in its various formats. However, the world of business tends to pursue talent recruitment and training separate from national education systems. The gifted and talented are often also discussed as problem solvers in the interest of national welfare and of the hoped-for development and economic success of individual nations. The least prioritized motive is surprisingly the individual needs and wants of the gifted and talented themselves. I have found that this is, and continues to be, that which primarily motivates educators and parents.

Contribution to the global economy

The gifted have been described as "the world's ultimate capital asset" (Toynbee, 1967), and also that they "… guarantee a constant reservoir of individuals who will … lead, both … research and development, and education, thus continuing to propel recruitment of the community, the State, and humanity at large toward a knowledge-based economy" (Sever, 2011; p. 454). In Korea "creativity has come to the forefront in considering Korea's future in the global economy" (Seo, Lee & Kim, 2005; p. 98). The same is true of Azerbaijan (Mammadov, 2012); and of course true also in Europe as well as in the U.S. Policy makers are urged to meet the needs of intellectually precocious youth because they represent "extraordinary *human capital* for society at large" (Bleske-Rechek, Lubinski & Benbow, 2004; p. 223; my italics).

The idea that education serves the purpose of individual enlightenment and empowerment is increasingly overshadowed by the global knowledge economy's demand for growth by innovation. The continuous discovery of new marketable products and services often emerges from high-achieving gifted and talented individuals. According to the World Bank "only educational spending that is immediately profitable is … justifiable and studies [such as] in anthropology and cultural studies are … irrelevant" (Puiggros, 1997; p. 218). For this reason, according to some scholars, we need to "persuade policy makers of the desirability of gifted education programs and services … [and] to improve our communication regarding the prospective and actual economic benefits of gifted education" (Clinkenbeard, 2007; p.7).

Their contribution to saving the World

The world really does need problem solvers in view of recent years global problems and crises, from shattered economies, to environmental disasters, and the emergence of an increasingly fickle climate for the entire planet. Who are equipped to better assist than the gifted and the talented? However, consider what Joan Freeman (2005) has argued, namely that the gifted need *permission* to be gifted. This is a most important aspect of the hopes and efforts we tend to invest into the pursuit of gifted education.

The World Economic Forum has recently published a report on global risks (Howell, 2013); problems that we may all encounter irrespective of in which country we live. These are *severe income disparity, chronic fiscal imbalances, rising greenhouse gas emissions, water supply crises*, and *mismanagement of population ageing*. The report rates these critical issues in terms of how likely it is that they can be avoided or are, in fact, already a manifest problem. They all rate as "almost certain" (that is, on a scale from 1 to 5, certainty ranges from 3.84 to 4.14).

Also quite recently, the rather unique Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University, published an equally alarming report

on the current threats to the survival of the Human Species (Bostrom, in press), which immediately caught the interest of the press and media. The researchers of the Institute point out that humanity has indeed had a knack for surviving every cataclysmic and threatening calamity over time thus far. But during the last few decades or so there have developed threats for which there are no track records of surviving, namely *synthetic biology, nanotechnology, machine intelligence, computer algorithms controlling the stock market,* and *the manipulation of genetic structure*.

As a global community, why do we not take appropriate action immediately to protect the environment and to work toward real world peace? Technological advancements have far exceeded advances in moral and spiritual development (Bostrom cited in Couglan, 2013). How great an interest does the scientific community actually have in focusing on human survival as a research problem? Bostrom (in press) compares the number of published scholarly articles on three randomly chosen research topics plus studies focusing on human extinction. These were all published in 2012 (as listed in Scopus, August 2012). He found that there were approximately 1000 studies on "dung beetles", about 600 on "snow boarding", 100 on the chemical compound "Zinc Oxalate," and only a handful of published papers were devoted to "human extinction". Apparently, the interest to study and ponder the survival of humankind carries little weight in the scientific community. A fair guess of why this imbalance of priorities exists is that there is no or little research funding available to study something that does not immediately support economic growth. It is therefore also unlikely that such study would fast-track any scholar to a distinguished academic career and therefore be of limited interest (see Waluszewski, 2013).

The needs and wants of the gifted and talented

Most will know the UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs from 1994 (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1994). It speaks compassionately and very reasonably on the *individual* needs and rights of every child:

> Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs. Education systems should be designed and educational programs implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs (p. viii)

With the emerging global knowledge economy, however, there has been a rapid shift of emphasis in many school systems worldwide, from an individual right to education satisfying individual children's needs to school systems mainly producing quality manpower capable of developing and sustaining a knowledge economy. In the wake of this shift, the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) was launched in the year 2000. Seventy nations worldwide are involved and their aims include "evaluating" evaluate education systems by testing students' abilities in reading, mathematics, and science, every three years. The testing program is, above all, a *political* instrument economic in nature (Lundgren, 2011). It has very little to do with the needs and interests of individual students.

By and large, I think that educators currently experience the impact of the changing motives for education, but most have *probably not reflected on why, and by what structural means, these changes are taking place*. As policies of education are in the process of changing, therefore, a majority of educators would still tend to prioritize children's individual needs. So much so that educators are encouraged to increasingly emphasize the *economic* benefits of their work when interacting with policy makers to be listened to (Clinkenbeard, 2007).

Dogma and conflict: on the denial of human nature

We need and want the gifted and talented for their potential input into the global economy; their ability to resolve difficult problems potentially threatening the welfare of the humanity, and of course, because they have educational needs and individual interests that need to be met. This all seems quite straightforward and uncomplicated, so why does gifted education have problems with theory, with implementation, and even with worldwide recognition of the field? Only about 17% of the

World's countries pursue some type of systematic educational intervention for gifted and talented children (Sever, 2011).

I propose that there are two main reasons for these problems: The first is *dogmatism* and the second the frequent failure of much of the academic world to recognize *human nature* and taking it into account in research and application.

Dogmatism is often defined as—and I quote Boreland's (2010) definition and elaboration of the original Milton Rokeach (1954) construct—a closed mind characterized by a stubborn refusal to acknowledge truth; a willful irrationality within a context in which rationality is a valid criterion for assessing the soundness of one's thinking.

Human nature, on the other hand, tends to refer to the distinguishing characteristics, including ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that humans tend to have naturally, *independently* of the influence of culture (as defined by Wikipedia, undated). In other words, these are adaptive aspects of human behavior not necessarily subject to a learning process (Saveliev, 2010; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990).

Dogmatism must not only be understood as a psychological construct designating certain individuals' disposition. It is also a defense mechanism protecting "Self" and everything that constitutes identity (Greenwald, 1980). In consequence, dogmatism can be understood not only as maladaptive but quite the contrary: it could just as well be the result of adaptation to the expectations and demands of any social context. Hence, dogmatism may certainly promote coping and helps survival in a certain social environment.

The history of science is not one always characterized by humility. A number of scientists through history have argued that their contributions to science were nothing short of the ultimate discovery after which few worthwhile further discoveries could ever be made. Nobel Prize Laureate Albert Michelsen, for example, in 1888, proudly stated that, "the more fundamental laws and facts of physical science have all been discovered" (as quoted by Sheldrake, 2012; p. 19). But after his demise Quantum Physics arrived, Einstein's Theory of Relativity was proposed, nuclear fission was discovered, and we learnt that there were billions of galaxies beyond our own spiral galaxy The Milky Way. Apparently there was more to learn after Albert Michelsen!

In the social sciences it has been much the same. Well known, and surprisingly still often quoted, is the audacious statement of Behaviorist John B. Watson (1930) that any end result is possible given the right upbringing of children. Equally astounding is the insistence on "non-essentialism" by social constructivists. This tenet precludes the influence of genes or hormones on human behavior (Burr, 1995; Pinker, 2002). However, we have learnt through discoveries in other disciplines such as genetics and physiology, that all things are not possible irrespective of how stupendous an environment is for bringing up children (e.g., Sternberg, 1996). Also, human behavior is most certainly swayed by physiological factors even down to the choice of a life partner if such a choice happens to be a cultural option (e.g., Vincent, 1990).

The scientific community often speaks of and enthusiastically envisions almost unbridled progress and development, but it surprisingly often acts as if knowledge was absolute, static, and new discoveries were uninteresting (e.g., Sheldrake, 2012). Robert Sternberg (2011) has very succinctly pointed out that the knowledge and research constituting the foundation for gifted education is, in fact, also largely static. It has changed surprisingly little over time. He has suggested three main reasons for this:

1. *The urgent societal need for real world practice* in education. Particularly the Western World has little patience to wait for what stringent and time-consuming research processes have to suggest.
2. *The accountability movement* insisting on the pursuit of "quality" through business models on every aspect of work and education and their means of control, which tend to be insensitive to human abilities and individual needs (see also Sahlberg, 2010).
3. *Budgets:* the shortage of money for particular programs and research. These are usually dependent on political will as well as of the ideological recognition of the field, which varies worldwide.

These three reasons are more or less the result of neoliberal ideals by which education is

currently motivated and transformed by to better fit a global knowledge economy (e.g., Leydesdorff, 2006). But, there are further likely reasons why our understanding of giftedness and its education have progressed very little over a long period of time (as reported in Ambrose, Sternberg & Sriraman, 2011).

4. We have *narrow understandings of giftedness* with a bias towards the analytic and its testing.
5. We are usually unaware of the impact of *cognitive conservatism and familiarity;* that is, we tend not to like to change; not even if necessary in light of research evidence.
6. We are similarly unaware of *a variety of personality traits, stereotypes, and group behaviors* prompted by human nature.

The latter three are all due to dogmatism and to the very tangible, but usually ignored influence of human nature. Our refusal to acknowledge human nature, Harvard University's Steven Pinker (2002) has argued, "is like the Victorians' embarrassment about sex, only worse: it distorts our science and scholarship, our public discourse, and our day-to-day lives … The dogma that human nature does not exist, in the face of evidence from science and common sense that it does, is … a corrupting influence" (p. ix)

Modern knowledge monopolies

Furthermore, we often speak enthusiastically of academic freedom. It is often argued to be the basis of all higher education and research. However, the academic world has in spite of such an age-old ideal never been entirely free to think, say, write, or study everything in pursuit of personal convictions and interests. The academic world, for good and for worse, has been ruled not necessarily always by external political influence but by internal and dominant *knowledge monopolies* deciding definitions of truth and their suitability. More importantly, such monopolies tend also to suppress new ways of thinking (Christian, 1980; Innis, 1951). However, monopolies usually have political sanction and tend to be motivated by gain, power and influence rather than by epistemological conviction, empirical discovery, objectivity, and accuracy. Henry J. Bauer (2012) of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University has studied three such current knowledge monopolies:

> In astronomy, everyone must accept the Big Bang Theory of the origin of the Universe. If not there is an influential group of 510 astronomers worldwide insisting that such alternative research must not be funded nor should proponents of an alternative theory even be allowed a mainstream public forum to be heard (Arp *et al*, 2004).

In medicine, scholars must embrace the assumption that HIV is always the cause of AIDS. Scientists who argue otherwise will find it difficult to be taken seriously and can expect rejection when submitting manuscripts for publication in the most famous journals for medicine. A group of 2600 researchers and others stand behind this normative single explanation insisting on the causality of HIV (Thomas *et al*., 1991).

In studying climate change, to retain credibility and the continued support of political leaderships, one usually needs to accept the dominant position that the climate is changing and that this change is caused mainly by human intervention (e.g., Doran & Zimmermann, 2011; Mann, 2012).

I would like to add another monopoly to these. How is *giftedness* understood in various parts of the World? Which of the two following views is the more politically correct one?

a) To understand giftedness as normally distributed and therefore constituting an attribute of a small group in any population, or
b) to understand giftedness as a possibility for everyone in any population given that school systems and their teachers are sufficiently trained and knowledgeable?

My observation is that in Europe, particularly in Northern Europe, it is politically very difficult to discuss giftedness as exclusive to only a few. The issue of labels is generally avoided but if used the term "talent" is preferred signifying a potential development for each and everyone. It matters little whether the underlying assumption is scientifically right or wrong, the similarity and equality of each member of society is *ideologically* enforced. Contrary views are discouraged, ignored, and sometimes even publicly ridiculed (e.g., Henmo, 2009). Arguing talent for all is acceptable, condoned, and

rewarded, whereas arguing giftedness for a few is, as a rule, not an option for any career-minded scholar in need of political support and research funding.

There certainly are very earnest and honest scientists generating well-considered research and theory; making new discoveries, but with differing views of the origins of the Universe, on the underlying causes of AIDS, on the reasons for climate change, and the understanding of giftedness in society. As a result of their politically incorrect stance they tend to be ignored, marginalized, and sometimes even stigmatized by the dominant knowledge monopolies and by everyone with a vested interested in retaining a monopoly unchanged. There are unavoidable forces, both internal and external to universities, motivating each academic, for good and for worse, to conform to a variety of canons (e.g., Bourdieu, 1990).

Robert Quinn (2004), heading the Scholars at Risk Network, based at New York University. He has pointed out, that

> Evidence suggests that academic communities remain favorite targets for repression. In the information age, the scholar's role in shaping the quality and flow of information in society is an unquestionable source of power. Repressive authorities intent on controlling societies naturally seek to control that power. Scholars are obstacles to these goals because the nature of their work requires the development of ideas, exchange of information, and expression of new opinions. Where the ideas, information and opinions are perceived by authorities as threatening, individual scholars are particularly vulnerable. Such scholars are labeled—explicitly or implicitly—as "dangerous," "suspect," "disloyal," "dissident," or "enemy" of the state, society, faith, family, culture, and so on (p. 1)

It is important to recognize that repression here must *not* be understood as referring to any specific country (Table 1). Repression of information or knowledge contrary to dominant knowledge monopolies is *universal*. Only the means and the degree of ferocity by which such repression is pursued differ. All nations do this no matter how democratic, and they have always done it, prompted by human nature.

Table 1: Actions taken towards scholars worldwide as identified and recorded by Scholars at Risk Network in 2013 (Scholars at risk, 2013).

Type of actions taken	Frequency	Country
Violence	19	Afghanistan, China, Jordan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Syria
Wrongful imprisonment	13	China, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe
Wrongful prosecution	6	India, Tunisia, Turkey, Zambia, Zimbabwe
Retaliatory discharge from position	4	Belarus, Uganda
Travel restrictions	2	China, UAE
Other restrictions, harassment, imposed limitations	20	Azerbaijan, China, Guatemala, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Singapore, USA

Human nature and the gifted mind

Dogmatism should be understood as the impact of *dominance behavior through aggression*, especially the defense and conquest of territory; the assertion of dominance within well-organized groups, and as the disciplinary action used to enforce implicit and explicit rules of any group (Wilson, 2004). Aggression is unavoidably part of human nature and has biological determinants (Kemp, 1990; McBride-Dabbs & Goodwin-Dabbs, 2000). We are programmed by evolution to defend our interests for as long as they somehow serve our survival. Perceived threats are handled by humans and other animals alike by a) Posturing; b) submission, c) escape, and d) attack and elimination (Barnard, 2004; Grossman, 1995).

Our first choice is generally not to eliminate the threat posed by another individual. It is to scare the threat off by demonstrating superiority. If this proves successful, and whoever threatened us is convinced of the opposing "greater strength," he or she may choose to simply leave to seek safety elsewhere. However, the threatening individual may resort to forming liaisons instead. It is better to be friend and ally to perceived superiority rather than to be its foe. As a last resort, if nothing else works, we address the perceived problem with an intention of eliminating it once and for all.

In the light of dogmatism and dominant knowledge monopolies it is prudent to consider the degree of submission and adaptation *necessary* to fit into any social group ruled by the dynamics imposed on all social animals by evolution, and compare with the typical characteristics of gifted behavior. Winner (1996), for example, has portrayed the gifted as:

> … risk-takers with a desire to shake things up. Most of all they have the desire to set things straight, to alter the status quo and shake up established tradition. Creators do not accept the prevailing view. They are oppositional and discontented (p. 276).

Researchers Janos and Robinson (1985) have summarized the known characteristics of intellectually gifted individuals as self-sufficient, independent, autonomous, dominant and individual, self-directed, intellectually curious, reflective, creative, imaginative and non-conformist.

Given that these studies of the gifted personality are reasonably correct for a majority of gifted individuals, although perhaps not all, it raises a most important question in the light of why we are interested in promoting the gifted and the talented: How feasible is it to expect the gifted to contribute to the global economy; to be the warrants for any nation's future welfare and wealth, and if need be, perhaps also serve the World as saviors of the human prospect?

Reaching a place of influence and trust in any society, the gifted—like everyone else—first have to adapt, conform, and prove loyal to the many existing canons and dominant knowledge monopolies and their influential leaders. Their allegiance must also be proven and rewarded (e.g., Carpenter, Bowles, Gintis & Hwang, 2009; French & Raven, 1959; Gintis, Bowles, Boyd & Fehr, 2003). This means that they often have to compromise their own identity, their personal values, and the way in which they tend to function without socially imposed restrictions. I have encountered enough a number of highly gifted individuals in a variety of walks of life to know that making such compromise is an almost insurmountable challenge to them. It is almost always tied to conflicts, self-doubt, frustration, and over time to alienation and clinical depression.

I would like to make a bold proposal at this stage, namely that the gifted seem often to have the means to *override* their human nature. Being aware of it they may decide to act contrary to their human nature and not necessarily follow their "instincts." They often refuse to accept that which does not conform to their own logic, conviction, or insight. Since their conclusions rarely coincide with those of the dominant knowledge monopolies, conflict—both internal and external—with their immediate social context arises and becomes a problem to continued employment or co-operation (e.g., Shekerjian, 1990). As a result the gifted individual becomes regarded as a difficult troublemaker threatening both social cohesion and the perceived competence and standing of individual leaders (e.g., Furnham. 2008; Kelly-Streznewski, 1999; Persson, in press).

Note that difficulties such as these are also what research into the work satisfaction of gifted adults employed by rigid and formal organizational settings have found (Lackner, 2012; Nauta & Ronner, 2008; 2013; Persson, 2009). I can only envision one exception to when the gifted mind does not suffer in a strictly formal and often contradictory setting, namely when a gifted individual is subject to a more or less psychopathic disposition. Individuals with such a personality tend to be daring, charming, highly intelligent, visionaries and risk-takers, often with no moral compass and have little or no empathy (Babiak & Hare, 2006); or to put it like Kevin Dutton (2012) at Oxford University does: "psychopaths are less morally squeamish, but only when it comes to playing for high stakes" (p. 212, adapted by the present author). Such individuals are increasingly being seen as role models in the corporate business world (Boddy, Laddyshewsky & Galvin, 2010), and it has been

suggested also that they played a major part in causing the latest global financial crisis commencing in 2008 (Boddy, 2011). It is worth considering perhaps, if it is in this light we need to consider "the scary rich who are also the scary smart"; as recently referred to in the *Forbes* business magazine by Jonathan Wai of Duke University (Wai, 2012a; 2012b).

The gifted are in all likelihood able to live up to most of our expectations in theory. They are no doubt potentially phenomenal assets to any institution, nation, organization, or employer. But *only* if permitted to be gifted in accordance to how they actually function, and if the social context in which they work is accepting of them, supportive, and the setting is relatively free of imposing formal strictures (Amabile, 1988; Judge, Colbert & Ilies, 2004; Persson, 2009; Shaughnessy & Manz, 1991). There is a considerable difference between what the gifted can do and what they are socially sanctioned to do!

Culture in defining, identifying, and promoting giftedness.

In conclusion, I also need to focus briefly on culture in reference to how we perceive giftedness and talent. In a recent issue of *Gifted and Talented International* devoted to cross-cultural issues, it was concluded that addressing cultural uniqueness and its significance to gifted education is by no means novel in research and application (Persson, 2012a). It is, however, a fact that in spite of the available knowledge base it has had a relatively limited impact. In view of the discussion thus far, this is not difficult to understand. Knowledge monopolies and the dogmatism that accompany them may certainly explain why—as Sternberg (2012) pointed out—gifted education has changed little over a long period of time.

There are at least four different types of human culture (Figure 1): Unique ethnic cultures, subcultures within these, a general culture shared by all, but most importantly in this context, there is also an overarching *superculture*. This is highly relevant, since the notions of globalization and knowledge economy constitute such an influential superculture (see Wolf, 1977; for a detailed definition).

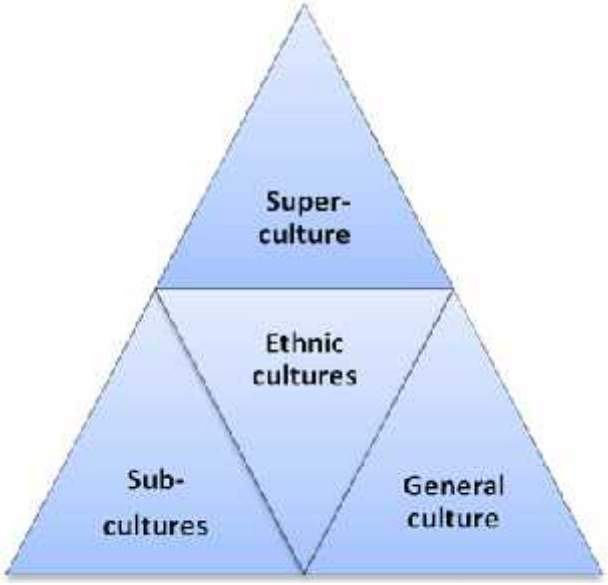

Figure 1: The societal culture field impacting daily life, work, science and nation building (From Persson, 2012b).

This supranational system of ideological and mainly neoliberal values (e.g., Harvey, 2005). exerts an increasing influence on what we do as researchers and educators and also how we increasingly learn to think about giftedness and science in general. The gifted and talented, however they are defined theoretically, are undoubtedly in the process of becoming commodities on the global

market, being embraced by the superculture and its production needs rather than by native ethnic cultures.

Note that there are 53 multinational corporations in the World; all with an accumulated wealth *greater* than 120 of the World's nations. Needless to say, these corporations will go to great lengths to acquire the talents they need for continued success (Chambers *et al.*, 1998). It is worth pointing out that researchers of the global economy and its influence on daily life actually warn that multinational corporations pose a potential threat to democracy in their sometimes relentless pursuit of growth and profit (Chandler & Mazlich's, 2005). A large portion of control flows through a small tight-knit core of financial and global institutions This core is termed a "super-entity" by a group of Swiss researchers at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zürich (Vitali, Glattfelder & Battiston, 2011).

With the neoliberal superculture fully developed in the form of a knowledge economy, we can expect that gifted human capital will be very appealing to every policy-maker and corporate executive worldwide with a vision of global dominance convinced of economic growth as the model to follow. However, this is assuming that such highly desired human capital actually can be made to fit into rigid organizational structures, which I have shown in this paper is often a considerable problem.

Not all countries have the same inclination to embrace a knowledge economy entirely and uncritically. While Europe, and I think much of the Western World, has more or less relinquished the idea that cultural expression and age-old tradition have an intrinsic value not necessarily profitable (European Cultural Parliament, 2006), India, and I think a number of other nations in Asia, Africa and in South America, have a more balanced understanding of combining tradition and cultural expression with the notions of progress and economic development.

Conclusion: Who defines giftedness?

So, who does define what giftedness is? We could probably haggle over which theories and constructs are the best to define giftedness and talent for a very long time to come. However, considering current global development, as well as the related increase of interest in individuals capable of more and better achievements than most others, it is quite obvious that a focus on what the gifted are able to do is much more interesting to policy makers and multinational corporations than is a focus on how such human capital assets are defined theoretically (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Corporate life, the world of entertainment, the world of policy and ideologies, all tend to understand the highly able in different ways (Table 2). To these giftedness is mainly a *function*. To the academic world high ability has rather been understood as a set of theoretical descriptors. Understanding giftedness as function in a social context has, to my knowledge, not even been on the agenda.

Table 2: The understanding of talent/giftedness in different societal groups (adapted from Persson, in press).

Sphere of interest	Common Label	Perceived Prevalence	Key Question
Corporate (Leaderships)	Talent	Rare	What can they do?
Corporate (Production)	Talent	Common	What can they do?
Popular (Entertainment)	Talent/Giftedness	Rare	How much do we like it?
Political	Talent/High achievement	Common	Do they conform ideologically?
Academic (Psychometric)	Giftedness	Rare	Do they fit theoretical criteria?
Academic (Cognitive Expertise)	Talent	Common	Is educational support excellent and have they learnt to train deliberately?

The pragmatic answer to the question of who decides what giftedness is, is that there are a number of deciding factors; there are academic concerns, but there are also more practical concerns as defined by society with little interest in the theoretically finer points made by academics. Furthermore, within each group with vested interests in high ability are unavoidably individuals promoting and defending their own agenda for a number of reasons, prompted unaware by human nature, often resulting in dogmatic attitudes and creating new knowledge monopolies.

As complex as this pattern of social dynamics appears the bottom line is, that whoever has dominance, by whatever means, also ultimately reserves the right to definition. This is dominance as based on social power and influence. The foundation for such dominance rests not on factual accuracy, rational logic, or empirical evidence, but on aggression in its various expressions.

My conviction is that the academic world is at a crossroads. Perhaps this is true of the World in general as well (e.g., Marjan, 2011). Google executives Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen (2013), for example, foresee a future in which we exist in two parallel civilizations: the physical and traditional one and the virtual one. Other thinkers and researchers speak of a new world order (e.g,, Ohmae, 1995; Slaughter, 2004). However, as Oxford University's Future of Humanity Institute, has pointed out, while we are quite literally going "where no man has gone before," we do so in incredible haste, characterized by little understanding of moral responsibility, and in the wake of a global economy we seem mainly motivated by corporate growth and gain, aided and sustained by Information Technology, which we are increasingly allowing to operate without human control.

I find it deeply disconcerting that the World is so obsessed by technological progress and prowess and that education systems worldwide are made to serve this development uncritically; while equal importance is not given to moral responsibility, individual concern, and unique cultural expression.

It is also worrisome that high ability is viewed as a commodity and is increasingly becoming a key issue in policies embracing global development towards a knowledge economy. There is already a "War for Talents" in full operation (Chambers *et al.*, 1998; Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison, 2006).

I do think there are choices to be made in regard to how we wish our future to look like, but do we as scholars and educators have the mindset of the gifted and talented? Are we risk-takers with a desire to shake things up? Do we have the desire to set things straight, to alter the status quo and question established tradition challenging current knowledge monopolies?

We do need the gifted and talented in our day and time more than ever! Moreover, I think, to the extent that it is possible, we need to be more like them at heart!

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