An Experiential Model of Giftedness

Giftedness from an Internal Point of View, made Explicit by Means of the Delphi Method

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Abstract

This article describes a qualitative study of self-definition by gifted adults. By means of a Delphi method twenty gifted adults were interviewed about their personal perspective on the core features of gifted people. This resulted in an experiential (existential, phenomenological) model of giftedness which appears to be an interesting instrument in counseling the gifted adult because it is empowering and practical. In the Netherlands this model is known as the Delphi Model of Giftedness.

Keywords: gifted, adult, qualitative study, Delphi method, model, experiential, existential, self-definition, personality, ideal type.

Introduction

The Problem and Objective of the Study

In 2006 the Dutch Giftedness Fund drew our attention to its observation that a substantial part of the Dutch adult gifted community considered the existing definitions and models of giftedness of no use in their everyday lives. There were several reasons for this complaint.

First, existing descriptions of giftedness focused on gifted children, while gifted adults are no longer involved in primary learning processes, and the "asynchronous" development as seen in gifted children often synchronizes, slows down or seemingly evaporates. Second, gifted adults experienced the definitions in use as theoretical and distant, not applicable to their daily working, social, loving, recreational, studying and parenting lives. The current definitions were not helpful in really understanding themselves and the problems they experienced. Nor were they helpful in explaining themselves to other people. Third, existing definitions of giftedness suggested or required excellent performance and lasting achievement as an essential part of giftedness. Giftedness had to be proven over a long period, while many gifted adults do not excel (at all, or anymore), or they perform in a way that is not valued by our society. Many of them are *not* extremely outstanding and, consequently, feel that they fall short and are problematized.

So, at the request of the Dutch Giftedness Fund, we undertook – in collaboration with gifted adults themselves – a new effort to describe what it *means* to be gifted from an *internal* point of view: how giftedness is experienced and perceived. Before starting we formulated criteria which had to be met. First, the new description had to be created systematically, be meaningful, significant and internally consistent. Next, it had to be accepted by most of the members of the target group, be of practical use to gifted people themselves as well as to outsiders and to all age groups (youth as well as adults and seniors), and it had to be applicable to all areas of life. Last but not least, the description should be neutral by nature, comprehensible, compact and yet complete, appealing and expressive, and usable in public relations.

Existing Definitions and Models

In order to determine whether a definition that would meet our criteria already existed, we examined literature from 1975 up to 2007. We found a classification of definitions made by Mönks and Mason in 2002 (Table 1). We concluded that the majority of definitions and models of giftedness were inadequate to our purpose because most of them addressed only indirectly – or not at all – to how giftedness *feels* from an internal point of view, to the inner meaning of being gifted. Gifted people cannot relate to such definitions because they describe giftedness from an *external* point of view. Moreover, many definitions were only applicable to children or emphasized achievement. For example, the definition by the Columbus Group (Silverman 1997) stresses inner experience, but applies it to children:

> *"Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally."*

Another example is the definition by achievement as stated in the Marland Report (1972):

> *"Children capable of high performance demonstrate achievement and/or potential ability in one or more of the following areas: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, psychomotor ability."*

Only definitions which belong to the category "psychological definitions" (third in Table 1) seemed to partly meet the criteria we formulated. All other categories did not clarify the question what it feels like to be gifted, based on personal experience.

Table 1. Definitions of Giftedness
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Biological	Giftedness is innate – you have it or you don't; it cannot be taught, increased or enlarged.
Cognitive	Giftedness is a set of cognitive abilities like reasoning, analyzing, problem solving and memory.
Psychological	Giftedness is a conglomerate of personality traits like task commitment, creativity, perfectionism, wisdom, intensity, complexity, drive, inner experience and high awareness.
Pedagogical	Giftedness is the result of a learning process.
Developmental	Giftedness is an asynchronous development that needs support in order to crystallize.
Economical	Giftedness is only measurable by achievements; only individuals who continually perform at an excellent level deserve the label gifted.
Sociological	Giftedness is not an individual achievement, nor an inborn gift, but the result of the interaction with the environment, including the factor luck (chance).
Cultural	Giftedness is subject to cultural values; what is gifted in one culture may not be gifted in another culture.
Medical	Giftedness is a risk in relation to non-giftedness, to normality.
Domain-specific	Giftedness is a polymorphic, multiform phenomenon; there are many kinds of giftedness.
Psychometric	Giftedness is high measured intelligence.

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Adapted and revised from Mönks and Mason (2002)

Psychological definitions of gifted people often list – briefly or more elaborately – characteristics which are not ordered in a comprehensible, logical or mutually coherent way. Jacobsen (1999), for example, described gifted people as *intense, complex and driven*. By 2007, the leading psychological description was Silverman's (2005). She described gifted people as *intense, complex and sensitive*. Both authors listed in addition some dozens of characteristics by which one could recognize gifted people. [Silverman's extended list is shown in Table 2]. They derived these characteristics from their daily work with gifted children. Sternberg, in his later work (2003), proposed *intelligence, wisdom* and *creativity* as the core elements of giftedness. All the features mentioned are certainly recognizable, but it is not always clear why precisely these features are chosen and in what mutual theoretical relationship one should see them. Besides, statements like "I am gifted, so I am …." or "I am gifted, which means to me…" derived from these definitions or lists are – though conceivable as stated from an internal point of view – either too short (not complete enough), too long (not practical) or not done (one doesn't say: "I am wise").

Table 2. Silverman's Characteristics of Gifted People
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Reasons well	Prefers older companions or adults
Learns rapidly	Has a wide range of interests
Has extensive vocabulary	Has a great sense of humor
Has an excellent memory	Early or avid reader
Has a long attention span (if interested)	Concerned with justice and fairness
Sensitive (feelings hurt easily)	Mature judgement
Shows compassion	Keen observer
Perfectionistic	Vivid imagination
Intense	Is highly creative
Morally sensitive	Tends to question authority
Has strong curiosity	Has facility with numbers
Perseverant in areas of interest	Good at Jigsaw puzzles
Has high level of energy	

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Adapted from Silverman (1993, Giftedness in Adults Scale)

In addition to such enumerative definitions, scientist-researchers developed some multidimensional models of giftedness ranging from descriptive to developmental. The more descriptive models, like the Three-Ring Model of Renzulli (1986), the Triarchic Model of Sternberg (2002) and the Triangle Model of Mönks (2002), as well as the multivariate developmental models like the Munich-Heller Model (Ziegler, 2002), again are of little practical use to gifted adults. In line with Renzulli's model, a gifted person could say: "I am gifted, so I am *creative*, *task committed* and *intelligent*". According to Mönks, a gifted person could say: "The meaning of giftedness for me is being *creative*, *motivated* and *extremely capable*, and *the way I became so is a result of family, peer and school influences*." And according to Sternberg, one could say: "I am gifted, so I feel *analytic*, *creative* and *practical*, namely *capable of smoothly inserting complex realities into my thinking*." Again, all these characteristics surely belong to giftedness, but sentences like these would never be pronounced by gifted adults in order to explain themselves to others. The multivariate developmental models are even more difficult to use in daily practice. There is no way to formulate a short and comprehensible sentence describing the way giftedness feels and works in one's life, based on such models (Figure 1).
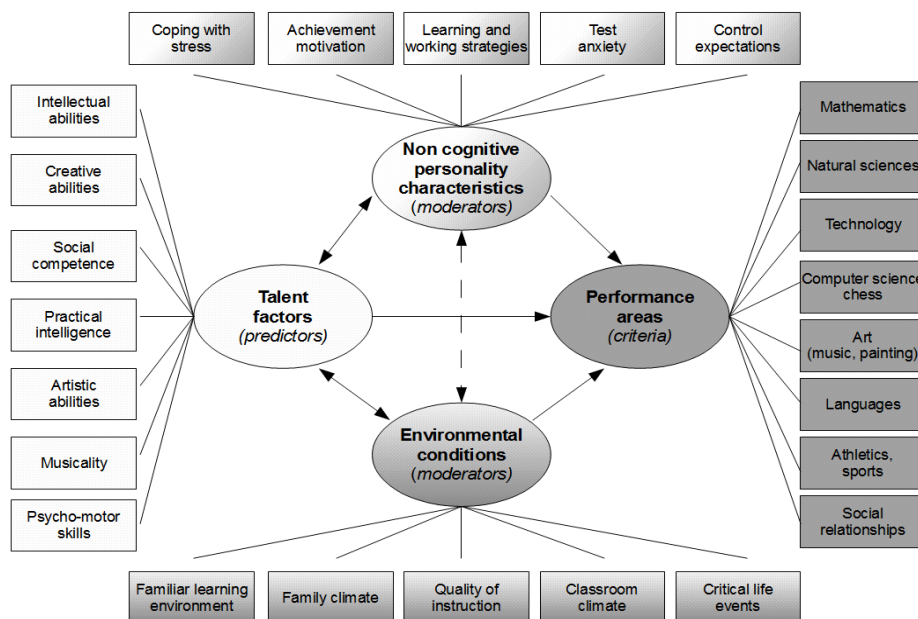
Figure 1   Multivariate Model of Giftedness (Munich-Heller)

The Question

We concluded that there, indeed, seemed to be no definition or model of giftedness that allows a gifted person to really comprehend his or her existence from an internal point of view, to grasp the over-all meaning of giftedness, or to explain himself or herself to someone else. One solution seemed to intensively rebuild one or another definition, but we had no idea in what direction this should be done. Another solution, just combining existing definitions, did not seem wise either, because the internal consistency and the mutual relationship would not be guaranteed. So, the question remained unaltered: is it possible to create – in collaboration with gifted people – a description of giftedness which is phenomenological and experiential by nature, logically consistent, compact and still comprehensible, empowering and usable for daily practice and public communication?

Method

The Delphi Method

We decided to search for such a definition of giftedness by asking *adult* gifted individuals which characteristics they attribute to themselves and to other gifted people including gifted children, and which core issues of being gifted they recognize in their daily lives. We could have used a questionnaire, but in our opinion that research method felt short of our intention, namely looking for a definition in *collaboration* with gifted people. We needed gifted people to really think along with us and reach consensus together.

So we chose a qualitative method according to the Grounded Theory of Glaser and Strauss (1960), the Delphi Method as described by Häder and Häder (2000) and Adler (2002) – an accepted method to reach consensus. This method is a structured communication technique, originally developed as a systematic and interactive forecasting method which relies on a panel of experts. Nowadays, it is also used as a means of reaching consensus on a topic. The method consists of several rounds in which experts answer questions. After each round,

a facilitator provides an anonymized summary of the experts' answers from the previous round as well as the reasons they provided for their answers. Thus, experts are encouraged to revise their earlier answers in light of the replies of other members of their panel. It is believed that during this process the range of the answers will decrease and the group will converge towards the "correct" answer. Finally, the process is stopped after a predefined stop criterion (e.g., number of rounds, achievement of consensus, stability of results). The benefit of the Delphi method is the exclusion of groupthink at the *beginning* of the process (by giving room to deviant opinions and creative ideas), while reaching consensus at the *end* of the process. The experts are deliberately working to meaningful consensus.

Parallel to the Delphi study we organized – since this is common practice in qualitative research – two other searches. First, we invited the self-identified gifted public via an appeal on the Giftedness Fund website to also define giftedness and react to the results of every phase of the Delphi study. The information we obtained in this way would be used as a *corrective* to what the experts told us. Second, we organized a conference to present the results and to *test* the consensus among gifted people about the definition of giftedness as created by the experts.

The Delphi Experts

The expert group was composed by the Giftedness Fund and some leading professionals in the field of giftedness. Together they had a good overview of Dutch experts who possess explicit and implicit knowledge of what it means to be gifted. They made a cross-section of professionals and fieldworkers who were gifted themselves *and* who had been working with gifted adults and gifted children for many years. The giftedness of the experts was measured by their evident IQ and their social and scientific achievements. Eventually 20 experts participated in five Delphi rounds: educational specialists, teachers, educationalists, counselors, psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, job coaches, occupational physicians and human resource managers. Half of them worked with children, half of them with adults. Nine of them were men, eleven were women. Their ages ranged from about 35 to 60 years.

The Delphi Rounds

The 20 experts participated in five rounds. By means of open questions they were asked to pronounce their view about the features of being gifted, primarily without consulting literature, only relying on experience, intuition and – as the Germans say – *Fingerspitzengefühl* (feeling in the fingertips, i.e. a kind of figurative sensitivity). In each round the role of the first researcher – gifted herself – was to set the course, to raise new questions and sometimes cut knots. By giving back the results of the last round, the experts could correct the researcher and confront her with flaws in reasoning, invalid arguments and misconceptions. The Delphi study was carried out via internet email and ran for over a year. The questions in each new round were determined by the results of each former round. Every round gave birth to a mass of information, in which we had to look for a core, a line, a pattern. The themes of the rounds (see the Appendix for an extensive description) were:

1. listing the core elements of giftedness as mentioned by the experts; skipping negative and contradictory features, presuming – and checking in the last round – they were only distorted positive characteristics or had a shared underlying concept;
2. unraveling the confusion of tongues between the experts by exploring adjoining and underlying concepts;
3. polishing and refining the emerging "conceptual scheme of adjectives" that described the personality of gifted persons;
4. trying to reduce the model by ranking and by regrouping the chosen adjectives;

5.   controlling the completeness of the model by asking the experts to list the "dark sides" or the downsides of all the positive features in the model.

Results

The Model of Giftedness
   Eventually we constructed a visual schematic description of giftedness all experts approved, except the feature called "creation-directedness" (see below). We called the scheme the Delphi Model of Giftedness (see Figure 2). It is an ideal type description of normally grown up, adequately supported and well-balanced gifted people.
   In the model, one can detect the rudiments of earlier models that passed in review. For example, the division between the internal world (the left field), the external world (the right field) and the interaction between them (in the middle). A human being is not a thing on its own. He or she exists in relation to and in exchange with the environment. There is something going out and something coming in: the person does – gives – things and receives – perceives – things.
   This scheme, however, did not cover all the characteristics the experts had reported. So we unrolled a finer diagram over the basic one. We called it an existential scheme (the circle and the rectangles). Existential in the sense that *everybody* – gifted or not – simultaneously exists, thinks, feels, wants, acts and perceives (receives). The point is that *gifted* people *color* these existential aspects and the interplay between them in their own – gifted – way. Therefore, we searched for the best fitting, over-arching *adjective* for each existential *aspect* and for the music they make together.

DELPHI MODEL OF GIFTEDNESS©
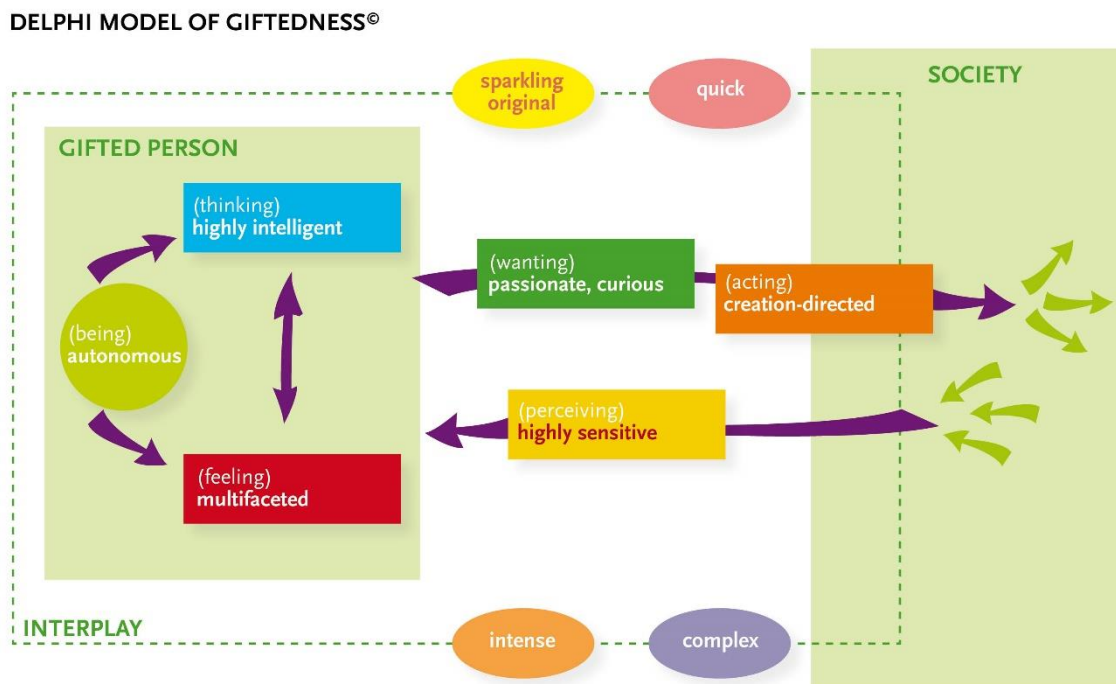
From: M.B.G.M. Kooijman - van Thiel (ed.). *Highly Gifted. Obvious? On Identity and Image of Gifted Persons.* OYA Productions, 2008

Figure 2   *Delphi Model of Giftedness – an Experiential, Existential, Phenomenological Model*

The Internal World

The somewhat motionless, background or basic *being* of gifted people is best characterized by the word "autonomous." Gifted people are independent and self-reliant. They make their own judgements, weigh their own arguments and stick with them, as long as nothing better shows up. It is a kind of keen and alert awareness of one's own position.

The *thinking* of gifted people is – needless to say – "highly intelligent". Gifted people, by nature, think analytically. Moreover, their thinking takes the shape of multidimensional matrix thinking, which means that gifted people can think simultaneously on many levels, tracks and moments and jump easily from one point to another in this mental space. Gifted people also think about thinking, which is called metacognition and includes the ability to recognize and handle concepts and values with ease. Highly intelligent thinking also means that patterns and structures are easily discovered, that there is a quick alternation of divergent and convergent thinking and a strong associative power. Intelligent thinking presumes a good memory and a large vocabulary.

The *feeling*, the emotional inner world of gifted people, is best described as colorful, finely nuanced, closely interlaced, richly varied and often visual-spatial – to put it briefly: "multifaceted". The emotional life of gifted people often manifests as a roller coaster in combination with rich imagination. Gifted people can see and experience in their mind's eye entire paintings and scenes in full color. They can even move through this reality, look at the objects in it from all sides and feel the entire atmosphere. Over and above this, their inner world is easily moved and disturbed.

As with all people, thinking and feeling influence each other, and their interaction is in turn influenced by the overall state of being. This means that autonomy flavors the interaction between intelligence and the richly colored inner world.

The Exchange with the External World

The *wanting* of gifted people is "curious and passionate". Gifted people usually want a lot, preferably immediately and preferably something novel. They are inquisitive and want to discover things in their own way, because they are autonomous. They are restless and always looking for the next interesting thing. When they've clung to something, they won't let go: they are persistent.

The *receiving* of gifted people can be called "highly sensitive". All senses are always hyper-alert. Or conversely, attention must be turned off rather than turned on. Gifted people hear, see, feel, smell and taste everything. Their perception is defined by sharpness and precision. Everything arrives at once, in all its nuances and with its full weight. Sometimes this stretches to feeling energies, perceiving vibes or psychic radiation – being sensitive to paranormal phenomena, like having a sixth or seventh sense.

Finally, the *doing* (acting) of gifted people is best characterized by the word "creation-directed". This adjective turned out to be the most controversial point among the experts. Some experts insisted on the adjectives "successful" or "excellent." Eventually, 80% of the experts agreed on the term "creation-directed." Thus, the majority decided that the acting of gifted people is not characterized by its attaining impressive achievements, but more by its being full of creative urge, of directedness towards creation. Gifted people are creative, and love to be creative. They are always designing, drafting or building something: a model, process, theory, plan, method, analysis, overview, invention, improvement, game, idea, product, puzzle, painting or piece of music. Occasionally, they create something that brings fame. Even when it seems they are doing nothing, the gifted are still creative: they build in their heads worlds of thoughts, structures, stories and images. The rectangle with the word "creation-directed" is placed half in and half out of society, illustrating that not all products of gifted people end up as excellent achievements in the outer world.

The Interplay of the Descriptors

When the whole cycle is up and running, one can see still four other qualities (depicted in the ovals) referring to the interplay – the music or the concert – of the distinct giftedly colored existential aspects. The gifted person, functioning in real life, is quick in every aspect. Besides this, the system sparkles and shines, radiates creativity, while everything is imbued with great intensity and based on – sometimes invisible – complexity.

The *quickness* one sees in gifted people is probably the result of the biological state of the nervous system. One can see speed in almost all aspects of the existence of gifted people. Stimulus enters quickly. An emotional world is soon made. Thinking is a high-speed process (sometimes looking slow at the outside because it is so extensive). And the end product is quickly envisaged. In early youth quickness may become apparent as advanced development.

The *sparkling original* side of the gifted can be seen in the form of inventiveness, originality, coming up with unexpected things and making of unconventional connections. Gifted people are not only creative, but they *enjoy* being creative. And that gives them a sparkle, makes them alive and playful. The creative side especially comes up in thought, will and performance, but also in feeling and sometimes even in perception.

There is also *intensity*: everything happens at full throttle, with great heat. All controls are turned up to the maximum and turning them off is difficult. To get an idea of this, try inserting the word "very" in front of all the existential aspects of the model – "very autonomous", "very quick" etc. – and the gifted person leaps to the eye.

Lastly, a gifted person is, in all aspects, a *complex* being, living a complex life, and capable of handling great complexity. A gifted person usually functions at different levels simultaneously, nothing is ever simple. He or she may be modest, but never simple. Gifted people can certainly simplify things, but always from a complex starting point, a complex background.

The Definition of Adult Giftedness

At the end of the Delphi search we put the visual scheme – the model – into words and arrived at the following definition:

> "A *gifted person is a quick and clever thinker, able to deal with complex matters. Autonomous, curious and passionate. A sensitive and emotionally rich individual, with great imagery, living intensely. He or she enjoys being creative."*

For the Dutch Giftedness Fund this definition was the goal. They accepted it as being the most practical and realistic description of a gifted person. However, as turned out in the years to follow, in *counseling,* particularly the scheme – the model – has the most influential and healing effect.

Negative Traits

In the last Delphi round the experts had to name the reverse sides of all the terms mentioned in the model. These "dark sides" (negative traits) often turned out to be exaggerations, clumsy performances, negative byproducts, unbalanced developments, collapsed versions or unpolished positive characteristics. Extreme *autonomy*, for instance, can look like arrogance or stubbornness. A too *richly colored emotional life* can give way to not being able anymore to distinguish between reality and fantasy or to quick emotional boiling over. Too much leaning on *intelligence* can slip into pedantry. And so on. All of the negative items mentioned in the last Delphi round were also named in the first Delphi round – as well as the other way round. In counseling, clients usually first recognize these reverse characteristics, whereupon the positive sources, the "bright sides," are slowly rediscovered and remastered.

Discussion

The Method

The Delphi method turned out to be appropriate to our goal. A strong point of the applied variant is the loop we created in the last round, in which we checked the ideas as elaborated and by which we were able to judge them reliable.

With regard to the experts, one could suppose that they were biased due to their professional occupation with problematic gifted people. In our opinion this is outweighed by the fact that the experts themselves are successfully gifted persons, who have many successful friends. So, during their life they were able to form an accurate picture of gifted persons both *out of* and *in* balance. Apart from this potential bias, the number of experts was enough in relation to the method, namely between 10 and 50 (Shelton & Crighan, 2015).

Regarding the role of the first researcher, one could say that she might have been too steering and too controlling. However, the first researcher in each round gave back all that was written in the round before and the experts could read whether their input was taken in, as well as how it was processed. Moreover, the expert group in its entirety was an extremely gifted group and mercilessly picked through errors, ambiguities and misconceptions of the first researcher.

Another point of criticism could be the low consensus reached on "creation-directedness." One out of five experts wanted to only call somebody gifted, if he or she displays excellent performances – over a long time, provable and valued by society. First, a consensus percentage of 80% is high in this kind of research (Shelton & Crighan, 2015). Second, the visitors of the conference were even more unanimous about the accuracy of the model, especially about the feature "creation-directedness."

The Descriptors

In order to check if lists of characteristics of gifted people, published *after* our research was completed in 2007, could possibly contradict the Delphi Model of Giftedness, we re-examined literature (Horowitz, Subotnik and Matthews, 2009; Prober, 2016; Silverman, 2013; Sternberg, Jarvin & Grigorenko, 2011; Piechowski, 2014; Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). We did not find characteristics that could not be fitted in our model.

At first sight, some commonly accepted characteristics of gifted people are *not* caught by the model. In our opinion it only *seems* that way, because we consider those terms as combinations of several Delphi terms, as refinements of one Delphi term, or as applications of Delphi terms in special fields. A *strong feeling of justice*, for example, is an intense emotion in the rich inner world of the gifted, connected to intelligent and meticulous thinking, concerning justice, being a field in which the creation-directed doing manifests. The gifted person who focuses on his or her strong feeling of justice is autonomous (the being) and driven in putting forward and defending his or her perception of incidents or situations (the wanting). Another characteristic of gifted people is a strong and most of the time negatively meant *perfectionism*. Positively considered, this is a love and desire for the beauty of the perfect. And this we see as an extreme and visualized aesthetic sense in the rich inner world, combined with a great wanting. The gifted person sees the perfect situation in his or her mind and has an intense desire to realize it. *Gifted humor* is another example. Such humor can be seen as a quick, complex and creative product of an intelligent mind, most of the time in collaboration with great imaginative power of the rich inner world. Further, there is the feature of *great empathy* (which sometimes includes a kind of paranormal giftedness), which is covered by both the Delphi terms highly sensitive and multifacetedly emotional – the perceiving of signals and stimuli being something different from the internal handling of them. Some other characteristics often mentioned in literature are *supreme awareness* and *transcendent consciousness*. As we see it, these are part of autonomy. Some panel members preferred to describe the "being" of gifted people as "highly aware" instead

of "autonomous" – which would have been an acceptable adjective too, but in the end was not chosen because the word "autonomy" was much more immediately recognized. Lastly, the often-cited characteristic of *high morality* can be seen as autonomy in combination with secure reasoning, concerning ethics, which can be seen as a field of application.

A controversial issue, of course, is our *not* using the over-arching adjective "excellent achieving" in describing the "doing" of gifted people. The criterion of achievement, however, is unworkable. For example, achievements might only be recognized after someone's death. Or they may be valued in one culture and not in another. And what about all the brilliant inventions that never got publicized or taken to production? And, if someone becomes famous at the age of 50, was he or she not gifted before? After all, how should a two-year-old "achieve"? So, we are convinced that the term "creation-directedness" is a good one, because it aims at the eagerness to achieve, the pleasure of creation.

The Model

As far as we know, in defining giftedness, no one ever has taken the position of distinguishing between existential aspects (the being, thinking, feeling etc.), coloring them by using adjectives (autonomous, driven, quick etc.) *in combination with* the arrangement of these features in a visual scheme. We emphasize this, because precisely this visual representation – rather than the worded definition – turned out to be remarkably helpful in counseling gifted youth and adults.

However, concerning the model as a whole, there were objections as well. One comment was that the model would fit all people – gifted and not gifted. The model would be no more than a universal description of people living their lives. We parry this criticism by stating that – as the experts see it – gifted people score extremely high on precisely *this* conglomerate of adjectives (i.e. variables). They, for instance, don't all score high on kindness, sociability, religiousness or handiness.

Another objection was that there are so many different gifted people. It couldn't be possible to catch them all in one model. This we parry by stating that the model is an ideal-typical description, the representation of *ein Idealtyp* (ideal type). This means, the description tells us what normally grown up, adequately supported and well-balanced gifted persons globally look like and globally experience in their everyday lives. In our view, a particular gifted person can score extremely high or relatively low on every Delphi characteristic. So in individual gifted persons, the model gives way to a great number of different profiles. A possible clustering of profiles is not investigated in this study.

Additionally, we want to state that not only scientists, but also top sportsmen, excellent handicraftsmen, great businessmen, famous dancers, fabulous painters, sophisticated poets and so on, can identify with the adjectives in the model. They are all theirs – great autonomy; quick, nearly intuitive, punctilious thinking; great imaginative power; hypersensitivity; restlessness with regard to goals; complexity; intensity; and sparkling original performances.

The next criticism was aimed at the positive approach of the model. In itself, the vast number of negative statements in the first round was remarkable and alarming: about one third of the items mentioned as being typical for gifted people was intrinsically negative. It shows the strength of the negative stereotypes which exist even in those who are very tolerant toward gifted people. To withstand and outweigh this negative burden and all of the prejudices resting on the gifted, we decided to describe a gifted person in balance. We took the perspective of normality, potential strengths and positivism. Not in the least because many gifted people – puzzled and harmed by the way they are treated by other people – are in need of this. They can use the model to develop a positive self-image and confront ingrained prejudices.

A final criticism could be the *not* defining the characteristics of gifted people exactly and mutually exclusive. We deliberately did not do so, because we wanted to work with the implicit

and common sense meaning of words and concepts, which have slightly alternating contents and more than one connotation.

Conclusion

Looking at the criteria we listed at the start of the project, we conclude that the model and the definition have been created in a systematic way. They are meaningful, internally consistent, accepted by the members of the target group, usable for gifted people themselves and for outsiders, usable by youth as well as by adults and seniors, applicable to all areas of life (living, working, loving, studying). And they are neutral by nature, compact and still comprehensible, colorful and expressive.

Looking at the model itself, we conclude that it is in line with literature, which in itself is not remarkable. The terms mentioned in the model are not new at all, except the term "creation-directed". But what *is* remarkable *and* new, is the way the Delphi Model of Giftedness puts these characteristics together in a relatively simple visual picture, meaningful and understandable for everyone – enclosing all of the core aspects of one's existence and the coloring of them by gifted people.

Acceptance and Usability

Since the publication of the Delphi Model of Giftedness in The Netherlands (Kooijman-van Thiel, 2008) many declarations of approval came to us and nowadays many coaches and counselors work with the model. The model seems to be a simple and effective instrument to help gifted people. It can teach gifted people about themselves, their gifted parents, partners and children.

When the model is presented to gifted people they react emotionally, because they finally understand the difficulties in their lives. *And* because they realize that they have an instrument to correct themselves, to explain themselves to colleagues or partners (by using parts of the model which are relevant at that moment) and to help themselves to flourish again. The model shows gifted people where things went wrong. And it shows a way out, because with the help of the model one can relatively easy switch between negative "dark" and positive "bright" characteristics. Besides, our observation is that relatively low scores on one of the Delphi variables at the *start* of the counseling rise *during* counseling. They concern "bright sides" of giftedness which were broken down or repressed and which are rediscovered and remastered during counseling.

Implications

At the end of this article we mention some *future* implications. First, with this model it is possible to create an instrument that measures giftedness as substitute or supplementary to IQ tests. Indeed, we are doing so, taking Silverman's and other questionnaires simultaneously into account. An interesting question is whether scores on this instrument substantially differ from IQ scores.

Second, we are developing a diagnostic questionnaire, in order to pinpoint problems in the development and in the momentary functioning of gifted people. After all, in regard to *every* variable in the Delphi Model, the development of a gifted person can go awry, be cut off, broken, or just not be polished.

Third, the model creates the opportunity, by scoring individual gifted people on the Delphi variables – as we will do – to look for a clustering of gifted profiles. Betts and Neihart's (2010) profiles of gifted children will be studied in relation to these Delphi profiles.

Fourth, we want to test if the model stands up when it is applied to a random sample of the population. Do people who are mentally retarded or who are in the average span of the intelligence curve really score lower on all variables in the model?

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Fifth, the Delphi Model of Giftedness has been created in the Netherlands. The existential concepts are well translatable in English, while the adjectives are more difficult to translate. Besides, it would be interesting to find out if experts in other countries or cultures would come up with the same concepts, arranged in the same way, using the same adjectives.

Last but not least, there is the question of how people *develop* this set of personality traits. This concerns the theory underlying the model we depicted in this article. What is the biological prerequisite, what are the social, cultural and psychological circumstances and processes which give way to gifted development and the type of personality as depicted in the Delphi Model of Giftedness? The theory we want to formulate will *not* be aimed at reaching excellence, but just at functioning healthily, happily and meaningfully and at realizing one's personal goals. Surely Dabrowski's (1977) overexcitabilities will be an important part of this description, as well as pedagogical theories that are not aimed at excellent achievement.

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Appendix A

The Delphi Rounds

The first round resulted in 12 pages of social, psychological, emotional and behavioral features that were held true for the inner experience of gifted people. We temporarily skipped all the negative features (about one-third of the items mentioned as being typical for gifted people), hoping and checking later that they were only distorted positive characteristics. We also set aside contradictory features, assuming that they, thus, were not typical of gifted people. At that moment we re-examined existing models, but none of them covered all the material. Thereafter, we ruminated on all kinds of visual arrangements of variables in order to grasp the core content of what the experts had written about being gifted, starting with very simple configurations and ending with a scheme we called an existential model. It depicted in verbs the most important aspects and their interaction of human existence in general. The aspects where virtually arranged in a way that shows the coherence and the mutual influence. All features mentioned by the experts easily fell into one of the categories. During the following rounds we looked for adjectives which – in case of giftedness – portrayed the distinct existential aspects best.

The second round was needed because of the emergence of related, underlying and synonymous concepts. We had to unravel a confusion of tongues concerning the words intelligent, gifted, talented, wise, sensible, smart, clever, skilled and competent. We had to take a position concerning the issues of morality and spirituality. A substantial part of the experts did *not* mention these two characteristics as essential to giftedness and were even reluctant to do so. We decided to see morality – as long as it does not refer to strong *feelings* of justice – as well as spirituality as domains of application of one's giftedness. Similar to specializing in mathematics, literature or music, handling high moral standards can be thought of as a skill in the field of values, philosophy and wisdom. Handling spiritual matters could be a skill in the domain of religion, mysticism and transcendence. Or to put it differently: not every gifted person is very good in moral or in spiritual matters. Furthermore, we had to tackle the discussion about basically different forms of intelligence and giftedness. We decided not to follow Gardner (1983) and other researchers (e.g. Carroll, 2003), who assume different inborn brain systems for gifted people and different kinds of intelligence. Instead we decided to see giftedness as a basic structure (like the *g*-factor in case of intelligence) which can be applied to different domains. Last but not least, we had to tackle the controversy about "showing achievements" as part of a definition. This was the most difficult part of the project, because the experts who insisted on achievement as a requirement for giftedness were a minority, but this minority was persistent.

In the third round, we analyzed thoroughly all the features that were mentioned. We struggled with synonyms, specifications (words of lower order) and combination terms (words of higher order). All to find the best fitting adjectives for the way in which gifted people give color to the existential aspects. Here we decided to not exactly define the variables of the model, but to rely on the more or less vague commonsense meaning of words. We did so because the Fund was looking for a definition which could be used for public relations. At the end of this round, we had eight adjectives left anyhow, and four adjectives on the reserve bench.

In the fourth round we tried to reduce the 12 adjectives that remained, by asking the experts first to rank them from most important to least important and second to cluster them. This meant that we temporarily called the structure of the model into question again. The result of the ranking was that two adjectives of the reserve bench got a regular place in the model. Grouping did not result in a better depiction of giftedness, because there was a great amount of overlap between the groups. Most of the time grouping gave way to formerly and, by argument, rejected models. Apparently, the model we developed was the best we could generate.

The fifth and last round was a controlling round. Assuming every positive characteristic to have a negative backside, and every negative characteristic to originally be a positive feature, we asked the experts to name the pitfalls, the exaggerations, the growing awry, the dark sides of all the positive terms in the model. To our great satisfaction, *all* of the negative features we skipped in the first round were recovered and none was omitted. Next we re-examined the contradictory features we also skipped in the first round. They indeed turned out to be dark and bright sides of only one or of two different fundamental Delphi variables. In this round we also proposed two translations of the model in full sentences. One was easily accepted.

Appendix B

Delphi Model of Giftedness – original Dutch edition
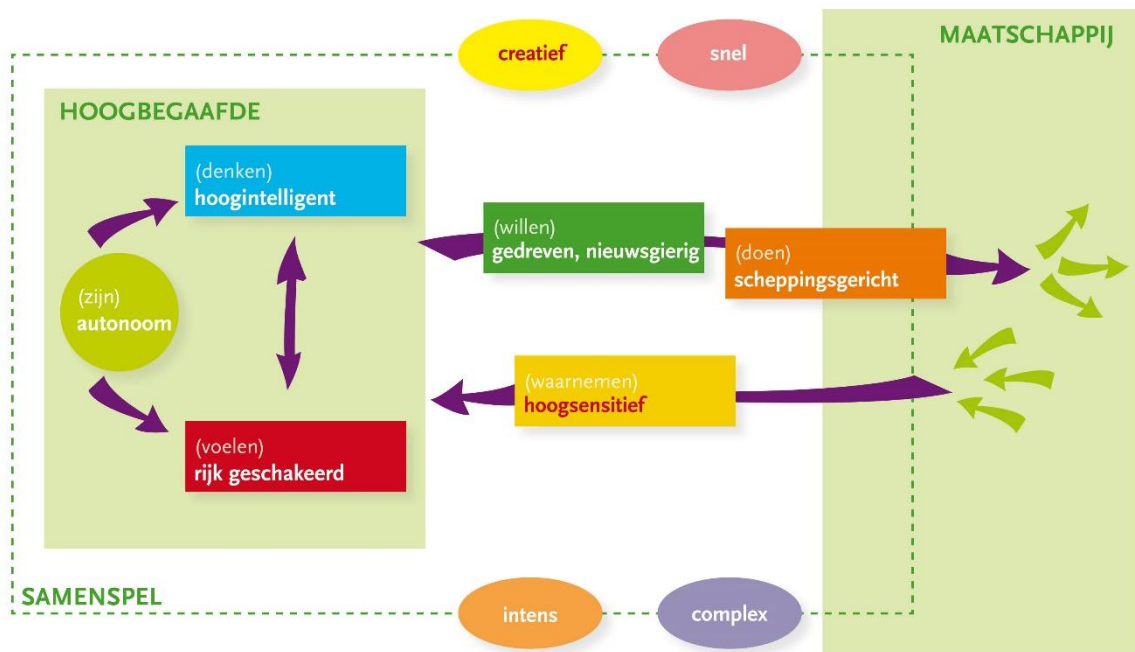
Uit: M.B.G.M. Kooijman - van Thiel (red). *Hoogbegaafd. Dat zie je zó! Over zelfbeeld en imago van hoogbegaafden.* OYA Productions, 2008