

Abstract

What is the aim of giftedness? Is the goal to narrow in on the gifts of a select few or to nurture everyone's gifts such that they may be exchanged with each other? Drawing from creativity theory, we emphasize the possible interactive element of giftedness. Current paradigms risk hidden creativity and potential remaining in the shadows. Is the promise of one possible eminent creator worth thousands of everyday creators? Do we need to make such a choice? By fostering perspective-taking and other collaborative skills, we may try to have it all.

Keywords: Giftedness, creativity, perspective-taking, CASE model of creativity

Building Off Creativity to Move from Gifted to Gifting

Central to the notion of “giftedness” is the idea of a “gift,” understood as a natural ability or talent. This gift is either possessed or not, a reifying feature accentuated by the termination in “-ness,” suggesting a state of affairs rather than a process. Yet what defines a gift in real life is the interconnected acts of giving and receiving, of being offered and then accepting the offer. Who is supposed to be giving the gift of talent? Historically, explanations ranged from God to genetics with a growing understanding of the role of the environment only emerging recently (for more on such paradigm shifts, see Borland, 2021). Spiritual and biological explanations focus our attention on gift-giving and the nature of the gift itself; what would it mean to reflect more on gift-receiving and on how abilities are put to use? What if “gifted-ness,” as a state, turned into “gift-ing,” as a process?

In this short paper, we argue that the very notion of giftedness works to obscure the shared and deeply collaborative nature of the creative “gifts” we are endowed with. Conversely, if we were to recognize giftedness as an interactive process of gifting and foster some of the skills – like perspective-taking – needed to share one’s talents, we would all benefit from its promise.

When the term “giftedness” is considered at a broader level and as a state, it can imply that either (a) a few select people have special gifts and should be given priority, or (b) everyone has their own particular set of gifts and we should try to find a way to enrich everyone. Currently, of course, the first view is largely the one implemented in the schools. As Sternberg (2020) notes, there is a transactional element; a student is singled out and given additional educational benefits with the implicit expectation that they will then reciprocally get good grades and test scores, attend elite universities, and proceed into high-status occupations. In any case, the implicit

assumption is that “gifts” are located somehow within the person and that, given the proper conditions, they will soon become manifest.

We will focus on this traditional locus of giftedness from a particular perspective on creativity, which is a frequent (if not dominant) marker of giftedness. This line of discussion can help us move toward conceiving giftedness less as a fixed point and more as a process (for the lack of a better term, the process of gifting). What does this approach consist of? Both authors have proposed models and theories that emphasize the idea that everyone has the potential to be creative at some level. These include the Four C’s, which traces creativity across a developmental trajectory, from mini-c (an initial burst of insight that may be kept to one’s self) to little-c (everyday creativity) to Pro-c (expert-level creativity) to Big-C (legendary genius; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). Moreover, we embrace distributed and interactive models in which the locus of creativity is not reduced to an individual mind but the space “in between” people, objects, and culture (Glăveanu, 2013, 2014). This sociocultural perspective makes us attentive to both the process of creativity and its context. Translated to the field of (creative) giftedness, such theories can help us understand this phenomenon as something constantly constructed and reconstructed, in action and interaction, rather than given (and received) at a fixed, measured point in time.

We move to the key question, then, of how we can widen our conception of how (nearly) everyone can participate in interactive giftedness rather recognize this as a static quality possessed by the elite few. A valuable hint comes, again, from creativity studies. Together, we have recently proposed the CASE model, which emphasizes the creativity that is hidden and kept in the shadows (author reference). CASE is an acronym which stands for the piece that creators might lack and, thus, not identify as being creative: Capital, Awareness, Spark, and

Exceptionality. Capital is knowing the appropriate domain knowledge and jargon that allows someone to be taken serious by insiders in a field. Awareness is having sufficient creative self-efficacy and creative metacognition to recognize one is being creative. Spark is being the person to have the original idea and, often, to be the “face” of the creative product. Exceptionality is having that rare breakthrough that is clearly creative (as opposed to habitual, routine creativity that occurs everyday). These four elements point to some of the most important barriers to the process of gifting one’s creativity – lacking capital, lacking awareness of one’s own creativity, lacking the spark that comes with having the original idea, and lacking exceptionality in one’s outputs. Such barriers may exclude people from forming an identity as someone who is creatively gifted and, thus, result in their creative work being relinquished to the shadows. How can the CASE model be used to challenge this dynamic?

The problem is that giftedness is currently conceptualized in rather static and essentialist terms. Such an elite perspective is likely to make those in the “shadows” feel even less creative.

People not selected for a gifted program will continue to miss out on Capital. Their creative abilities remain unrecognized, which then gives them less access to resources and fewer opportunities for engaging in creative processes. They may potentially develop lower creative self-efficacy and lose more Awareness of the fact that they are endowed with creative potential (one of the prized “gifts” celebrated in some select individuals). As such, they may lose the chance to consider their own achievements as creative. Those who are creative behind the scenes (missing Spark) or as part of their routine (Exceptionality) will have it further driven home that their contributions are not noteworthy or meaningful. They may come to believe, like the little drummer boy of song, that they have no “gift” worthy of sharing with others.

We argue that losing the sense of being creative is a key difficulty given current notions of giftedness and their educational applications. By focusing on identifying and attending to the naturally gifted, we lose sight of creative processes being a joint achievement. People depend on each other's ideas, perspectives, and support to discover and nurture their potentialities and talents. "Being gifted" should leave room in our educational system for "becoming gifted" or, better yet, "gifting" each other with as many opportunities as we can to reveal our own and mutual possibilities. Seen through the lenses of CASE, "gifting" involves: a) sharing different forms of capital (from economic to symbolic and social) in order to increase the chances of creative expression for most, and not for the few; b) helping each individual become aware of his or her creative potential and use this potential for the benefit of others, not only the self; c) recognize the spark of creativity in those who use any given cultural artifact in new ways, rather than invent it; and d) support one another to create exceptional things by not treating creativity as something divorced from everyday life but as a marker of how we live, creatively, together with others.

Such changes don't begin and end at the level of the individual. They need institutional backing and a change in how we understand the very nature of giftedness. A move toward dynamic, interactive, and contextual models implies adopting new values and practices. For instance, one key question to consider is what value system we have for different levels of creativity. Certainly, Big-C and Pro-c have more impact on the world than little-c and mini-c. It is reasonable to argue that the higher c-levels are, therefore, more important. They may advance a field or even shift a paradigm, thus influencing many more people's lives than any little-c or mini-c contribution. Yet how much more important is Pro-c than mini-c? Is nurturing one student toward Pro-c (or even Big-C) worth ignoring twenty mini-c or little-c students? What about

hundreds? As Choi and Kaufman (2021) note, most legendary works are not [merely](#) the result of one Big-C creator; they may include [the contribution of](#) thousands of little-c people. Further, without mini-c and little-c, there is no Pro-c or Big-C; we risk losing potential amazing creative contributions by focusing on people who may reach higher levels at younger ages.

So what does “gifting” bring to the theory and practice of “giftedness”? It offers a focus on process and not just outcome, on interactions and not just traits, on participation and not just possession, on relations and not just individuals, on sharing and not just having, and on now and not just the future. The last point reminds us that what much research and practice in “giftedness” does is paint beautiful pictures of how society could be if only we can develop the right tools to identify the gifted, find the best ways to educate them, invest enough in their potential, and best position them for future continued success – only then will the promise a gifted student be revealed. In contrast, gifting takes place in the present. It is in each and every act of recognizing in each other the fact that our potential (creative and otherwise) rests in what we do with our gifts.

Consider Sternberg’s (2021) nine categories of how people utilize their gifts encompasses transactional and transformational giftedness; whether we focus on ourselves, others, or both; and the valence of how we use our abilities. Although the element of other people is included in this model, we would add the question of how and with who we give our gifts. Do we create (or pursue excellence) by ourselves, with little interaction or input from others? Or do we pursue collaboration, giving our gifts and also remaining open to receiving them? We see the ultimate potential in encouraging all students to not only give their gifts but to exchange them – to be interested in other people’s ideas, opinions, and efforts.

We are not, we should emphasize, arguing for a one-size-fits-all approach to giftedness. Students will have different levels of abilities, needs, and goals. As Borland (2021) summarizes, the differentiation paradigm is less concerned with identifying gifted students and more focused on specific student needs. However, he also notes that many schools have such a policy but few use it in actual practice because of the time and resources required. And yet, there are many relatively small changes that can be done to everyday educational practices and to the way people interact with each other that could go a long way. For instance, we would love to see an emphasis on the dynamic exchange of gifts, with students learning, growing, and creating together. Ideally, diverse pairings and groups could lead to a variety of creative collaborations between students of different backgrounds, strengths, and (sometimes) abilities. Seeing the benefit, use, and even joy in other people's gifts may even encourage an understanding and empathy for those who may not be exactly like ourselves, something much needed in today's world.

Perspective-taking and other collaboration-fostering skills are an important addition the usual conception of giftedness as individual eminence. Nurturing creative talent is a social rather than strictly personal achievement. It requires dialogue and community just as much as individual abilities. The very nature of what we call creative and intellectual gifts is shaped by social interactions and collaborative exchanges (Glăveanu & Kaufman, 2017). Indeed, we argue that sharing one's gifts – acts that bring the whole phenomenon into existence – rely on empathy, perspective-taking, and openness towards others. Just as gift-giving and gift-receiving depend on an understanding of other's hopes, intentions, emotions, and beliefs, so does the expression of giftedness build on our human capacity to imagine the world as others experience it.

The notion of giftedness has served its purpose of making people, individually and collectively, much more aware of the need to cultivate creative talent and do so from early on in life. What we still need is a proper understanding of how everyone can participate in the sharing of “gifts” as a way of making them visible, useful, and growth-inspiring. Ultimately, few gifts are enjoyed alone. Does a gift even merit the label without the giving, receiving, and sharing?

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