

**ABILITY CLIMATE:
THE FORGOTTEN CULTURAL FACTOR
IN PROMOTING GIFTED EDUCATION**

ICIE Conference “Excellence in Education”, Istanbul, Turkey, 6-9 July 2011

Roland S Persson, PhD

School of Education & Communication
Jönköping University
PO Box 1026, SE-55111 Jönköping, Sweden
E-mail: pero@hkk.hj.se

Abstract

Intellectually gifted individuals are increasingly seen as the problem solvers of the future who are to secure societal prosperity and welfare. However, little attention has been paid to the fact that there may exist cultural obstacles in promoting intellectual giftedness in any given culture when setting such educational targets. If certain abilities are not highly valued in a given culture, it seems unlikely that increasing an interest in education focused on excellence in these abilities would be as successful as hoped. The abilities needed for economical growth and continued welfare are not necessarily the abilities valued by the people who are expected to pursue such training. Successful implementation is likely to depend on the culturally dominant ability climate. The presentation focuses on a recent study of ability climates in 29 European countries as based on socially represented notability. The analysis of data yielded three types of European ability climates: A uniform ability climate; a divergent ability climate, and a diverse ability climate; each of which was characterized by clusters of abilities that seemed to be particularly valued in a given European country. Only nine of the participating countries appeared to feature an ability climate conducive to intellectual pursuits.

Introduction

Consider the following observation of the so-called *Rocard Report* (Rocard *et al.*, 2007) on young individuals and future career choices in Science and Technology:

Many studies have highlighted an alarming decline in young people's interest for key science studies and mathematics. Despite the numerous projects and actions that are being implemented to reverse this trend, the signs of improvement are still modest. Unless more effective action is taken, Europe's longer-term capacity to innovate, and the quality of its research will also decline (p. 2).

This decline of interest is of the greatest concern to the policy-makers and leaders of the European Union and, needless to say, any region of the World having an expressed interest in economical growth. Intellectual achievements resulting in innovation and commercial production are much sought after on the assumption that intellectual prowess in terms of research has the potential to secure continued economical growth and by implication also welfare. Talent and intellectual giftedness have therefore become a particular concern of many governments worldwide. The recent Hungarian EU Presidency declared, on behalf of all of Europe, that "to find gifted individuals and to develop their talents is in the interest of any nation ... Properly supported talents will contribute to better commercial competitiveness and help realise strategic goals ... For this reason talent support is essential to strategic targets involving innovation and sustainable growth (Hungarian EU Presidency, 2011). If, however, continued societal welfare is dependent on intellectual prowess as manifest in Science and research why is it that relatively few are interested in the Sciences and Mathematics when such training would seem a golden career opportunity for the younger generation?

Endeavouring to shed some light on possible explanations of this apparent conundrum the aim of this paper is therefore 1) to introduce the culture-based construct of ability climate as a factor in promoting giftedness and talent; 2) to propose a plausible explanation as to why ability climates vary between cultures as based on both learnt and socio-biologically determined behaviour and also 3) to suggest implications for the implementation of Gifted Education as well as Human Resource Management of the gifted and talented in outlining a so-called "Pudding Paradox."

Sweden, Norway and the Nobel Prize

In quite a few studies since the mid-1990s the societal resistance against the notion of someone being intellectually gifted in Scandinavia, and in particular in Sweden, has been well documented (Persson, 1998; 1999a; 1999b; 2005; 2007; 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2010; Persson, Joswig & Balogh, 2000). This is surprising considering that a host of nations globally view gifted education, and especially *intellectually* gifted individuals, as a paramount means to secure a country's continuing competitive edge in the World economy and to maintain future welfare. Shavinina (2009), for example, speaks of an emerging talent-based world economy. Such resistance is also bewildering in the light of the fact that the Swedish and Norwegian award the World's most prestigious recognition of intellectual achievement: The Nobel Prizes. This phenomenon is likely to be the result of socio-political developments during the Post War Era. The Nobel Prize was the result of Swedish industrialist Alfred Nobel's last will and testament: "It is my express wish that in awarding the prizes no consideration whatever shall be given to the nationality of the candidates, but that the most worthy shall receive the prize, whether he be a Scandinavian or not" (The Nobel Foundation, 2010). The Nobel Prize came into being during a time when German culture and

intellectualism were very much the ideals to follow in Northern Europe; ideals which were abruptly abandoned by the end of World War II (cf. Almgren, 2005). The sentiment by which Alfred Nobel wrote his last Will and Testament needs to be compared to the ideals of former Swedish prime minister Olof Palme, who made the following statement in addressing secondary school pupils in the 1960s: “You do not go to school to achieve anything personally, but to learn how to function as members of a group” (as quoted by Huntford, 1972, p. 204). This statement signals a dramatic change in societal perspective, which as far as the Swedish school system is concerned, meant a change of focus from individual and intellectual pursuits with excellence as an implicit objective, to a more collectively oriented focus with an explicit objective of bringing all students up to an acceptable minimum standard only emphasizing functional skills and collective social responsibility (Husén, 1979).

Apparently, cultural values in both Sweden and Norway have changed dramatically during the post-war era; a change that has prompted an entirely different *ability climate*. Intellectual pursuits do not seem to be valued as they once were!

Defining Ability Climate

There is likely to exist a socially determined system of how abilities are valued; a system that varies between cultures. In other words, countries probably differ on the basis of how they value human skills (Jodelet, 1989; Persson, 2011). In addition, there has to exist also an evolutionary explanation as to why certain skills but not others are negatively or positively reacted to universally. The resistance towards focusing on giftedness, and especially certain intellectual skills, is by no means limited to Northern Europe (Persson, 2009). Abilities are likely to have, or be given desired or undesired functions in a societal context irrespective of location.

It is feasible to assume that there exist culture-specific ability climates. Such an ability climate may be defined as the existence of a certain permissive pattern according to which abilities in a social context are valued. Some are in demand, sought after, and could possibly lead to recognition and fame, while others are merely tolerated or ignored, and in some cases even unwanted and therefore actively prevented or even ridiculed (Persson, 2011).

Studying the ability climates of Europe

The change of population values in much of Scandinavia since World War II raises the question if the notion of ability climate is valid also in the rest of Europe, and of course if the current anti-intellectual ethos so prevalent in Northern Europe may be discerned similarly in other cultures and countries also. A research project was launched in order to study 29 European countries focussing on the variation of values related to abilities (Table 1).

Table 1. Participating European countries and their ccTDL-code

AT = Austria	IT = Italy
BE = Belgium	LT = Lithuania
BG = Bulgaria	LV= Latvia
CH = Switzerland	LU = Luxembourg
CY = Cyprus	MT = Malta
CZ = Czech Republic	NL = Netherlands
DE = Germany	NO = Norway
DK = Denmark	PL = Poland
EE = Estonia	PT = Portugal
ES = Spain	RO = Romania
FI = Finland	SE = Sweden
FR = France	SI = Slovenia
GR = Greece	SK = Slovakia
HU = Hungary	UK = United Kingdom
IE = Ireland	

Fame (in the study termed notability) was chosen as key-variable for comparison between countries. Fame is ability or achievement that is recognised

internationally. The cause of notability is a complex social issue (Braudy, 1997; Evans & Wilson, 1999; Giles, 2000). This was, however, not focused on in the study. The *variation* of social representations between cultures and countries was.

The individual whom any culture would like to be the representative of internationally reasonably has a bearing on how that culture values abilities and skills. In Moscovici's (1973; 1989) terms fame is "socially represented." Hence, a list of internationally notable individuals assembled by a collective of individuals representing a given nation, such as is provided by the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*, would provide important information about the kinds of achievements and abilities that are particularly valued in any given culture. The basic idea of *Wikipedia* is that data contribution is a collective process; that is, anyone who feels that they have something of substance to contribute may do so (Fallis, 2008; Meyer, 2006). A selection to a list of international fame will at some level represent national pride, since all cultural groups have a need to establish a collective identity as separate from the collective identity of other cultural groups (Billig, 1996; Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002).

The type and frequency distribution of notability on the participating countries allow for the exploration of how culturally based ability climates vary. It is significant to observe that Wikipedia is now considered as reliable as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and is quoted as reference in peer-reviewed journals. Several researchers who have specifically studied the reliability of Wikipedia content defend the encyclopedia as reliable. But, like with any other encyclopedia, they also point out that it is not entirely infallible (Arazy, Morgan & Patterson, 2006; Arup-Nielsen, 2008; Chesney; 2006). A number of exclusion criteria were employed also. Famous individuals listed had to have achieved something by skill and/or personal effort. For example, individuals famous by heredity such as royalty or famous by association were excluded. Furthermore, no individual prior to the year 1400 was included in consideration of the fact that Johan Gutenberg (1398 – 1468) introduced modern book

printing at the time, which has had a considerable influence on historical development and its documentation from that point and onwards.

For data to be reasonably representative Internet penetration amongst the participating countries needs to be satisfactory. The average penetration level was 68% ranging from 36% (Romania) to 93% (Sweden). Nine countries had a penetration rate of +70% (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Finland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovakia, United Kingdom).

Having employed the exclusion criteria, the lists of European notables contained in all 20.516 individuals representing 29 European countries. A content analysis of the lists yielded six different ability clusters (See Table 2, with a few examples of whom were included in the lists). Two categories emerging from the analysis: Business and entrepreneurship (Category II) and Exploration and innovation (Category III) were both excluded from further analysis due to being only marginally represented in the data.

Table 2. *Ability groups and examples of included individuals. The italicised categories were excluded from further analysis.*

Category I: Arts and Entertainment (AE)

Michael Flatley (Dancer, Ireland); Gidon Kremer (Musician, Latvia)

Category II: Business and entrepreneurship (BE)

Liliane Bettencourt (Business, France); Aristotle Onassis (Business, Greece)

Category III: Exploration and innovation (EI)

Ernő Rubik (Inventor, Hungary); Amerigo Vespucci (Explorer, Italy)

Category IV: Intellectual Pursuits and Science (IPS)

Hans-Georg Gadamer (Philosopher, Germany); Amedeo Avogadro (Physicist, Italy)

Category V: Societal and socio-affective pursuits (SSP)

C-G Mannerheim (Military, Finland); Odette Sansom (French resistance, WWII)

Category VI: Sports and Physical Pursuits (SPP)

Franz Beckenbauer (Soccer, Germany); Tom Sharkey (Boxer, Ireland)

Continued analysis of the data showed that the participating 29 countries may be divided into three different types of ability climates each of which is dominated by one or more of the remaining four ability clusters: Arts and Entertainment (AE), Intellectual Pursuits and Science (IPS), Societal and Socio-Affective Pursuits (SSP) and Sports and Physical Pursuits (SPP).

Results suggest that there exists a *uniform* ability climate in which the abilities of any ability category dominated. This was true of the following countries: IE, SK, BG, UK, PT, CZ, SE, EE, HU, FR, IT, DK and ES. However, how abilities are valued could also be outlined as a *divergent* ability climate in which more than one ability category, but not all, were dominant: MT, CY, SI, FI, BE, LT, NO, GR, CH, LU, CZ, AT, PL, NL and RO. Finally, a mere few countries in Europe seem to currently embrace a *diverse* ability climate: DE and LV. That is, on a population level all ability categories are dominant and are thus also valued (Figure 1).

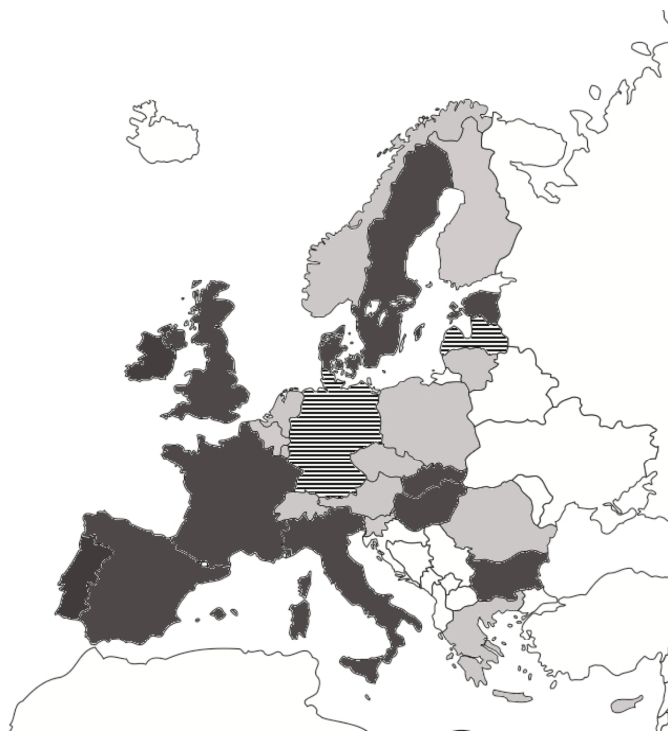


Figure 1. A Graphical representation of European Ability Climates: Uniform (Black), Divergent (Grey) and Diverse (Striped).

The analyses yielded a few interesting results: 1) Arts and Entertainment (Ability Category I) is dominant in *all* 29 European countries irrespective of type of ability climate; 2) Intellectual Pursuits and Science (Ability Category IV) is dominant *only* in nine European countries and mainly in the group of Germanic cultures. Never in a country with a uniform ability climate. Also, 3) all abilities (Ability Categories I, IV, V and VI) appear dominant in Germany and Latvia.

The Big Fish Little Pond Phenomenon revisited

The analysis also confirmed the existence of the so-called Big Fish Little Pond effect (Marsh & Hau, 2003): the greater the excelling reference group, the greater also the risk of developing a negative self-image. It may have a dampening effect on gifted individuals who are exposed to a relatively small and local reference group at first, then to a larger national group, and finally to a very large international reference group. Thus, the greater the number of individuals there are who match a certain level and kind of achievement, the more difficult it may be to maintain a single individual's positive self-image. As a consequence the incentive to keep developing the talent might also decrease (Marsh, 1991). In all, one might hypothesise the following two extreme but perfectly feasible case scenarios (Figure 2):

Figure 2. Two hypothesised case scenarios as based on the analysis of European ability climates.

A best-case scenario

would feature a gifted scientist living in a smaller and less populous country; a country where the ability climate is characterised by diversity and the Intellectual Pursuits and Science ability cluster (Category IV in the analysis) would be one of the dominant categories constituting the ability climate

A worse-case scenario

would feature a gifted scientist living in a populous country; a country where the ability climate is characterised by ability groups other than the Intellectual Pursuits and Science category (Category IV in the analysis)

Explaining why values change towards anti-intellectualism

It is known by research that "economic development is associated with major changes in prevailing values and beliefs: The worldview of rich societies differ markedly from those of poor societies," Inglehart and Baker (2000) observes and continue to argue that "this does not necessarily imply cultural convergence, but it does predict the general direction of cultural change ... (p. 50). In other words, it is reasonably fair to argue that affluence changes values and apparently in view of ability climates, such change *diminishes* the social value of intellectual pursuits and increases the value of more applied pursuits with a clearly expressed ambition for further financial gain. The transition from one and to the other is clearly demonstrated in the world of education at all levels. The Western World above all has for centuries treasured the pursuit of knowledge as enlightenment and as a rewarding end in itself. But with industrialisation knowledge has become increasingly instrumental. Knowledge without a view to monetary gain and production has become understood as largely futile. Tijssen (2003) notes, that "research excellence has taken on a new utilitarian and economic guise, marked by an emphasis on 'competitiveness' and 'centres of excellence'. Research excellence and research commercialization have become prime objectives for officials dealing with research policy. The three most important drivers of research excellence nowadays are the creation of new, high-quality scientific and technical knowledge, its transmission to user communities, and the commercial exploitation of knowledge" (pp. 91-92). One interesting example of development in this direction is how the number of academic staff at the world's universities has shifted from an emphasis on basic research to an emphasis on applied research. Frank and Gabler (2006) found in comparing a great number of universities worldwide that from 1915-1936 to 1975-1995 the number of faculty into basic research fell by 23% while the number of faculty into applied research increased by 35% and now dominate faculty structure globally by 53.4%. In fact, the objective of European, North

American and many Asian governments, on the basis on a Neo-Liberal ideology (Harvey, 2005), is *growth* by means of applied knowledge and economic control. The means to achieve it is through a so-called knowledge-economy in which applied research aimed at innovation plays a paramount role (Bordieu, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Giroux, 2004). Proponents regard this development as necessary for future global welfare (eg. OECD, 1996; Hart-Landsberg & Burkett, 2004; Sachs & Warner, 1995). Recently, the Hungarian EU Presidency (2011), wishing to boost this development by initiating a Pan-European effort to support talent through the Budapest Declaration of Talent Support stated that

... to find gifted individuals and to develop their talents is in the interest of any nation ... Properly supported talents will contribute to better commercial competitiveness and help realise strategic goals ... For this reason talent support is essential to strategic targets involving innovation and sustainable growth.

To this effect, however, French philosopher Michel Foucault (1991) has astutely noted that “if the accumulation of capital has been an essential feature of our society, the accumulation of knowledge has not been any less so ... The exercise, production, and accumulation of this knowledge cannot be dissociated from the mechanisms of power; complex relations exist which must be analyzed” (p. 165).

So, on a population level values seem to have shifted from a respect and desire for knowledge as enlightenment to a much more utilitarian view of knowledge as valuable *only* if producing tangible results. Needless to say, political philosophies have expressed this view in many and sundry ways, but the bottom line in regarding culturally based ability climates is that populations are subject to a socialisation process. Values change by learning, which has been studied and confirmed, for example, in terms of how parents’ political convictions tend to transmit to their children also, who with little reflection perpetuate them

taking them for granted (Glass, Bengtsson & Dunham, 1986; Niemi & Jennings, 1991). The same could be applied to attitudes towards giftedness in general and intellectual giftedness in particular in certain cultures and in certain social contexts.

In Norway and Sweden, prior to World War II, intellectual pursuits were revered and the cultural ideals of the Germanic cultures were shared. But by the end of the war ideals changed politically and quite dramatically. In addition, societal affluence grew and commercialism increasingly saturated society (Stearns, 2005). A shift away from the ideals of knowing for the sake of knowing to new ideals of utilitarianism and knowing as an instrument of economy took place. But this shift appears not unique to Scandinavia but is just as apparent in most of Europe and probably also beyond. Several researchers and educational policy-makers understand this shift of values as a paradigmatic shift, where school systems do no longer meet with the needs of society because schools run on the idea of knowledge being valued for its own sake while the surrounding society now functions on the idea that knowledge is instrumental (Abbot & MacTaggart, 2010; Gerver, 2010).

Socio-biological function: An inconvenient but significant factor

While ability climates are the result of cultural socialisation processes over time, there exists also an aspect of human behaviour that is indeed general to all of humanity but that is surprisingly often overlooked, both in research and in policy-making, namely the social function of giftedness. You appear to need *permission*, *courage* and *resilience* to be gifted (Freeman, 2005; Landau, 1990; Shekerjian, 1990), because “along with the promise of potential,” as Fiedler (1999) concludes in an extensive review of the socio-emotional difficulties of gifted individuals, “come the problems of potential—problems that are often a direct effect of differing from the norm in ways that others are not necessarily prepared to

deal with” (p. 434). Most of the prestigious MacArthur Award winners for example, from a variety of fields of endeavour, have encountered much suspicion and resistance from their social context when deviating too much in thinking or doing. Shekerjian (1990) interviewed 40 of them and concluded that “society shuns its heretics” (p. 16-17). The difficulty in gaining acceptance for new, and often probably better, ideas and testable theories in the academic world has always been infamously difficult (Segerstråle, 2000). In a more practical setting of corporate work, David Willings—a personnel management expert and scholar—offers a few typical statements as told by senior managers of intellectually gifted individuals being part of their workforce: “Why do we hire these intellectuals? They're no damned use. They don't fit in. They cause trouble”, and further “we had a very gifted young chap. He came up with two ideas which we have unashamedly stolen. But he never learned to follow normal procedure ... He left us after seven months and I think it for the best” (as quoted in Kelly-Streznewski, 1999; p. 132).

Intuitively we would often argue that being gifted is surely something positive and much welcomed in an ambitious but also troubled world. It would certainly seem, however, that at least in some social contexts the very opposite is true: being gifted is usually difficult at best and more like a curse, difficult to handle, at its worse (Brackmann, 2008; Fiedler, 1999; Kelly-Streznewski, 1999). There is most certainly a case for certain types of giftedness being *undesired* under certain circumstances. This is apparently especially true of intellectual giftedness.

It is therefore essential in studying giftedness, ”that we are aware of the more primitive action and reaction patterns that determine our behaviour, and to not pretend as if they did not exist. It is especially in the area of social behaviour that we are less free to act than we generally assume” (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989, p. 3). Of particular interest in explaining social response to giftedness is *dominance behaviour* through aggression, and especially the

defence and conquest of territory; the assertion of dominance within well-organized groups, and disciplinary action used to enforce the rules of a group (Wilson, 2004). Aggression is more multi-faceted than we are usually aware of. In addition, it is largely a function with biological determinants (Kemp, 1990; McBride-Dabbs & Goodwin-Dabbs, 2000). We defend intellectual territories also if our position of influence and authority is understood as dependent on it. Perceived threats are handled by humans and other animals alike in four ways: 1) Posturing, 2) Submission, 3) Escape or 4) Attack and Elimination (cf. Barnard, 2004; Grossman, 1995). Our first choice is generally not to eliminate the threat posed by another individual. It is rather to scare him or her off by demonstrating superiority in a variety of ways (posturing). If this is successful and we are convinced of the opposing “greater strength” we may choose to escape; to simply leave in order to seek safety elsewhere. However, we may resort to forming liaisons instead. It is better to be friend and ally to perceived superiority rather than to be its enemy (submission). As a last resort we attack and eliminate, with the ultimate purpose of once and for all ridding ourselves of the threat. Needless to say, this has been done in many ways in all cultures and in all societies and on all levels throughout history. Giftedness as a construct is invariably two issues combined: A cognitive hardware and a social response to it. It follows that if there is social significance awarded to giftedness, then giftedness also has a socio-biological function and may be understood as follows (Table 3)

Table 3. The socio-biological functions of giftedness and talent

Social function	Popular label	Universal social response
Maintenance	The nerd	Acceptance and promotion
Entertainment	The hero	Acceptance and promotion
Change	The martyr	Resistance, persecution, suspicion

A first social function needs to reasonably be a *maintenance function*. Societal institutions and markets alike need problem-solvers and facilitators for continued profit and welfare. Among them are scientists, engineers, health care staff, product developers, industrial designers, and so on. In a socio-biological perspective they indirectly maintain societal structures by inventions, refinements, and improvements within the domain of production in which they are active. Their effort gives a society the ability to attain or maintain welfare and perhaps also strengthen existing power hierarchies in a larger perspective.

A second social function is *societal entertainment*. It fills an important and much appreciated function to a great many people worldwide in various ways. These are the “heroes” we love and admire. They often become role models, willingly or unwillingly, for many who wish to become like them. To associate with them strengthens our sense of identity, or at times allow for individuals with a relatively poor Self-image to bask in their glory. Alternatively, these individuals may help to achieve a cathartic experience by means of, for example, a sport event or a concert. If so, no wonder that gifted individuals offering the best possible entertainment are promoted, popular, and are amongst the highest paid individuals in modern societies. They are popular musicians, actors, footballers, ice hockey players, popular writers, visual artists, and so on. Their skills are highly regarded and usually highly rewarded. From a socio-biological perspective, these individuals rarely present a challenge to societal structures and existing power hierarchies. Quite the opposite, they help maintain stability by diverting people’s attention from other and perhaps more critical matters concerned with, for example, unemployment, financial crises, equal opportunities, social welfare, education, discrimination, individual rights, and so on.

Gifted individuals having the potential to achieve change at any level of society stand out amongst the other social functions of gifted behaviour. Stigmatisation, marginalisation and persecution are frequent phenomena in this context (see Crocker & Quinn, 2003; Hall,

Stevens & Meleis, 1994). Above all, when by their knowledge and insight, they publicly expose flaws and incompetence in social systems, they immediately pose a threat to the dominance of a certain individual or group of individuals, especially so for individuals who have personal gains to make if systems remain unchanged. Presumably this is why researchers Judge, Colbert and Ilies (2004) found that "... it is dysfunctional for a leader's intelligence to substantially exceed that of the group he or she leads. This suggests that group intelligence moderates the relationship between leader intelligence and leader effectiveness ... group members simply do not like leaders whose intellect far exceeds their own" (p. 549). Through history these gifted individuals have often been termed *martyrs*. They are mainly individuals who are, in various ways, victimised in a group, large or small. In spite of their altruistic intentions, dominant individuals are very likely to interpret their potential to cause social change as a challenge to their own dominance. No position of dominance in a social structure will be abandoned lightly anywhere, and when threatened it will be defended. This fact has considerable relevance in engaging gifted and talented intellectual prowess in building our future if the building blocks of this future are neo-liberal in nature and strive towards a knowledge-economy!

The Pudding Paradox

The apparently low esteem for intellectual pursuits amongst a majority of European populations needs to be compared to policy-makers' expressed wish to secure an affluent welfare for the future as based on a knowledge-economy. Instrumental to this desired development are the intellectually gifted and talented. However, the expressed desire for socio-economic development and the effects of shifting values constitute a social paradox.

Given that the research results are reasonably accurate it seems that policy-makers are facing a dilemma: They desire a societal development that they cannot have for two reasons:

1) For the knowledge-economy to develop as desired a widespread interest in intellectual and scientific pursuits is a necessity. But apparently much too few are currently interested in such pursuits the likely cause being that affluence has diminished the general interest in all things abstract and intellectual.

2) However, even if intellectual pursuits and Science remained in high esteem amongst the populations of Europe, its instrumental use would still not be unproblematic nor likely to be supported in spite of decided policies. The gifted individuals are automatically viewed with suspicion because of their level of understanding, insight and often due to their independence, non-conformist attitudes and their knack for questioning rigid rules and incompetent authority (cf. Silverman, 1993; Quinn, 2004). Gifted individuals are “are 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” (Winner, 1996, p. 297).

Hence, neo-liberalist policy-makers express the desire for something that they probably cannot have, which could perhaps best be termed a *Pudding Paradox* after the cross-culturally valid idiom “to have your cake and eat it too” meaning that you cannot both eat your cake and simultaneously save it for another time. In other words, it is impossible to have it both ways. It is one or the other.

At the very least, the implementation of the knowledge-economy will be a problematic one since political will and objective do not currently coincide with neither cultural values as expressed by ability climates nor is the understanding of socio-biological functions of giftedness an issue.

Concluding thoughts

While the research into how abilities are culturally valued is thus far tentative, *the ability climate* appears a most promising construct in understanding the potential successes and failures of all aspects of implementing gifted education.

No doubt *population values* must be considered and possibly changed prior to implementing a developmental strategy if contrary to a certain ability climate. Because of this, perhaps the intended knowledge-economy on largely neo-liberalist foundations needs reconsidering! It seems to me that Third World perspectives offer a much more balanced and insightful view of the future. Indian scholar K. R. Shah (2003) questions whether industry in a knowledge-based economy is prepared to also shoulder the responsibility of providing non-marketable courses in future higher education since “courses having high economic value may not necessarily be having high social and cultural value ... It should be borne in mind that the involvement of industry, even financial to begin with, cannot be taken as a panacea for all the ills of higher education” (pp. 131 & 134). Patel (2003), representing the views of the so-called developing world, urges the forces of the emerging knowledge-economy to some restraint in a similar vein: “Let us not be mesmerized by the flattering notion that higher education is an investment good with productivity in economic terms higher than most other investment ... Higher education has returns which far transcend mere economic returns. These returns are the very substance of what development is all about, i.e., the quality of life in its totality including individual dignity and self-respect and command over one’s own life which are the true hallmarks of individual freedom” (p. 137).

In conclusion, values are not only a function of different cultural contexts, values also serve *evolutionary functions of social dominance*. No understanding of giftedness and talent can feasibly be complete without taking this into account also! Most likely any

developmental objective in society will be difficult at best if ignoring the socio-biological functions of mankind!

References

Abbot, J., & MacTaggart, H. (2010). *Overschooled but undereducated*. London: Continuum.

Almgren, B. (2005). *Drömmen om Norden. Nazistisk infiltration 1933-1945* [The Dream of the Nordic Countries. Nazi infiltration 1933-1945]. Stockholm: Carlsson.

Arazy, O., Morgan, W., & Patterson, R. (2006). *Wisdom of the crowds. Decentralized knowledge construction in Wikipedia*. Paper presented at The 16th Annual Workshop on Information Technologies & Systems (WITS), Milwaukee, WI. Retrieved 1 August 2010, from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1025624##

Arup-Nielsen, F. (2008). Scientific citations in Wikipedia. *First Monday*. 12(8), 1-5. From <http://arxiv.org/pdf/0705.2106>, retrieved 1 August 2010.

Barnard, C. J. (2004). *Animal behaviour: mechanism, development and evolution*. London: Pearson/Prentice-Hall.

Billig, M. (1996). Nationalism as an international ideology: imagining the Nation, Others and the World of Nations. I G. M. Breakwell & E. Lyons (Eds.), *Changing European identities. Social psychological analyses of social change* (pp. 181-195). Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Acts of resistance. Against the tyranny of the market*. New York: The New Press.

Brackmann, A. (2008). *Jenseits der Norm—hochbegabt und hochsensibel?* [At the other end of the Bell Curve—highly gifted and highly sensitive and perceptive] Stuttgart, Germany: Klett-Cotta.

Braudy, L. (1997). *The frenzy of renown. Fame and its history*. New York: Vintage Books.

Chesney, T. (2006). An empirical examination of Wikipedia's credibility. *First Monday*, 11(11), From <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1413/1331> retrieved 1 August 2010.

Chomsky, N. (1999). *Profit over people. Neoliberalism and global order*. London: Turnaround Publishers.

Crocker, J., & Quinee, D. M. (2003). Social stigma and the Self: meanings, situations and Self-esteem. In F. H. Heatherton, R. E. Kleck, M. R. Hebl and J. G. Hull (eds.), *The social psychology of stigma* (pp. 153-181). New York: The Guildford Press.

Eibl-Eibesfeldt, I. (1989). *Human ethology*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

- Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (2002). Self and social identity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 161-186.
- Evans, A., & Wilson, G. D. (1999). *Fame. The psychology of stardom*. London: Vision.
- Fallis, D. (2008). Toward an epistemology of Wikipedia. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 59(10), 1662-1674.
- Fiedler, E. D. (1999). Gifted children: The promise of potential/The problems of potential. In V. L. Swan & D. H. Saklofske (Eds.), *Handbook of psychosocial characteristics of exceptional children* (pp. 401-442). New York: Kluwer Academic.
- Foucault, M. (1991). *Remarks on Marx: conversations with Duccio Trombadori* (Translation by R. J. Goldstein & J. Cascaito). New York: Semiotext(e).
- Frank, D. J., & Gabler, J. (2006). *Reconstructing the university. Worldwide shifts in Academia in the 20ieth Century*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Freeman, J. (2005). Permission to be gifted. How conceptions of giftedness can change lives. In R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness* (2nd ed.) (pp. 80-97). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gerver, R. (2010). *Creating tomorrow's schools today. Education, Our children, their futures*. London: Continuum.
- Giles, D. (2000). *Illusions of immortality. A psychology of fame and celebrity*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press.
- Giroux, H. A. (2004). *The terror of neoliberalism: authoritarianism and the ecplise of democracy*. Herndon, VA: Paradigm Publishers.
- Glass, J., Bengtson, V. L., & Dunham, C. C. (1986). Attitude similarities in three-generation families; socialization, status inheritance and reciprocal influence. *American Sociological Review*, 51(5), 685-698.
- Grossman, D. (1995). *On killing. The psychological cost of learning to kill in war and society*. New York: Backbay Books.
- Hall J. M., Stevens, P. A., & Meleis, A. I. (1994). Marginalization: A guiding concept for valuing diversity in nursing knowledge development. *Advances in Nursing Sciences*, 16(4), 23-41.
- Hart-Landsberg, M., & Burkett, P. (2004, July/August). China and socialism: Market reforms and class struggle. *Monthly Review*, 56(3), 7-123.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of Neoliberalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hungarian EU Presidency (2011). The Budapest Declaration of Talent Support. Available at <http://www.conference2011.talenteday.eu/en/> (Retrieved 27 June 2011).
- Huntford, R. (1972). *The new totalitarians*. New York: Stein and Day.
- Husén, T. (1979). *The school in question: A comparative study of the school and its future in Western Europe*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Inglehart, R., & Baker, W. E. (2000). Modernization, cultural change, and the persistence of traditional values. *American Sociological Review*, 65(1), 19-51.

Jodelet, D. (1989). Les représentations sociales: un domaine en expansion [The social representations: an expanding domain]. In D. Jodelet (Ed.), *La représentations sociales* (pp. 30-61). Paris: PUF.

Judge, T. A., Colbert, A. E., & Ilies, R. (2004). Intelligence and leadership. A quantitative review and test of theoretical propositions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(3), 542-552.

Kelly-Streznewski, M. (1999). Gifted grown-ups. *The mixed blessings of extraordinary potential*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Kemp, T. D. (1990). *Social structure and testosterone*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Landau, E. (1990). *Mut zur begabung* [Courage to be gifted]. Munich: Ernst Reinhardt Verlag.

McBride-Dabbs, J., & Godwin-Dabbs (2000). *Heroes, rogues and lovers. Testosterone and behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Marsh, H. W. (1991). The failure of high ability high schools to deliver academic benefits: The importance of academic self-concept and educational aspirations. *American Educational Research Journal*, 28, 445– 480.

Marsh, H. W. (2003). Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect on academic self-concept: a cross-cultural (26-country) test of the negative effects of academically selective schools. *American Psychologist*, 58(5), 364-376.

Meyer, B. (2006). *Defense and illustration of Wikipedia*. Retrieved 1 August, 2010, from <http://se.inf.ethz.ch/~meyer/publications/wikipedia/wikipedia.pdf>

Moscovici, S. (1973). Foreword. In C. Herzlich (Ed.), *Health and illness: A social psychological analysis* (pp. ix–xiv). London/New York: Academic Press.

Moscovici, S. (1989). Des représentations collective aux représentations sociales: éléments pour une histoire [The social and collective representations: historical issues]. In D. Jodelet (Ed.), *La représentations sociales* (pp. 62-86). Paris: PUF.

Niemi, R. G., & Jennings, M. K. (1991). Issues and inheritance in the formation of party identification. *American Journal of Political Science*, 35(4), 970-988.

Nobel Foundation (2010). Alfred Nobel. The man behind the Nobel Prize. Retrieved 18th October 2010 from http://nobelprize.org/alfred_nobel/

OECD (1996). *The knowledge-based economy*. Paris, France: Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development. Retrieved on January 8th 2011 from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/8/1913021.pdf>

- Patel, I. G. (2003). Higher education and economic development. In J. B. G. Tilak, (Ed.). (2003). *Education, society, and development and international perspectives* (pp. 135-152). New Dehli, India: National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration.
- Persson, R. S. (1998). Paragons of virtue. Teachers' conceptual understanding of high ability in an egalitarian context. *High Ability Studies*, 9(2), 181-196.
- Persson, R. S. (1999a). Exploring high ability in egalitarian settings: Swedish school teachers and gifted students. *Gifted and talented International*, 10(1), 6-11.
- Persson, R. S. (1999b). High Ability, society and its future. The broader curriculum. *The Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*, 8(1), 5-14.
- Persson, R. S. (2005). Voices in the wilderness: Counselling gifted students in a Swedish egalitarian setting. *International Journal of Applied Counselling*. 27(2), 263-276.
- Persson, R. S. (2007). The myth of the anti-social genius. A survey study of the socioemotional aspects of high-IQ individuals. *Gifted and Talented International*.22(2), 19-34.
- Persson, R. S. (2009a). Intellectually gifted individuals' career choices and work satisfaction. A descriptive study. *Gifted and Talented International*, 24(1), 11-24.
- Persson, R. S. (2009b). The unwanted gifted and talented. A sociobiological perspective of the social functions of giftedness. (pp. 913-924). In L. V. Shavinina (ed.), *International handbook of giftedness*. Dordrecht: Springer-Science.
- Persson, R. S. (2009c). *The talent of being inconvenient: On societal functions of giftedness*. Paper presented at The 18th World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children, Vancouver, BC., Canada, 3-7 August.
- Persson, R. S. (2010, in press). Ability climates in Europe as socially represented notability. *High Ability Studies*, 22(1), 59-76.
- Persson, R. S. (2010). Experiences of intellectually gifted students in an egalitarian and inclusive educational system: a survey study. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 33(4), 536-569.
- Persson, R. S., Joswig, H., & Balogh, L. (2000). Gifted education in Europe: Programs, practices, and current research. In K. A. Heller, F. J. Mönks, R. J. Sternberg & R. Subotnik (Eds.). In *International handbook of giftedness and talent* (2nd ed.). (pp. 703 – 734) Oxford, UK: Pergamon/Elsevier Science.
- Quinn, R. (2004). Defending “dangerous” minds. Reflections on the work of scholars at Risk Network. *Items & Issues* (Social Science Research Council), 5(1/2), 1-5.

Rocard, M., Csermely, P., Jorde, D., Lenzen, D., Wallberg-Eriksson, H. & Hemmo, V. (2007). *Science education now. A renewed pedagogy for the future of Europe*. Brussels, Belgium: European Commission, Directorate-General for Research. Retrieved 9 August 2010 from <http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.topic&id=1244>

Sachs, J. D., & Warner, A. (1996). Economic reform and the process of global integration. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 1, 1-118.

Sejerstråle, U. (2000). *Defenders of the truth. The battle for science in the sociobiology debate and beyond*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Shavinina, L. (2009). On giftedness and economy: the impact of talented individuals on global economy (pp. 925-944). In L. V. Shavinina (ed.), *International handbook of giftedness*. Dordrecht: Springer-Science.

Silverman, L. K. (1993). A developmental model for counseling the gifted. In L. K. Silverman (ed.), *Counseling the gifted and talented* (pp. 51-78). Denver, CO: Love Publishing Company.

Shah, K. R. (2003). University-industry relations in financing higher education. In J. B. G. Tilak, (Ed.). (2003). *Education, society, and development and international perspectives* (pp. 123-134). New Dehli, India: National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration.

Shekerjian, D. (1990). *Uncommon genius, How great ideas are born*. New York: Viking.

Stearns, P. N. (2001). *Consumerism in World History. The global transformation of desire*. London: Routledge.

Tijssen, R. J. W. (2003). Scoreboards of research excellence. *Research Evaluation*, 12(2), 91-103, p. 91-92.

Wilson, E. O. (2004). *On human nature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Winner, E. (1996). *Gifted children*. New York: Basic Books.