What Is [Or Should Be] the Pedagogy of Gifted Education Programs

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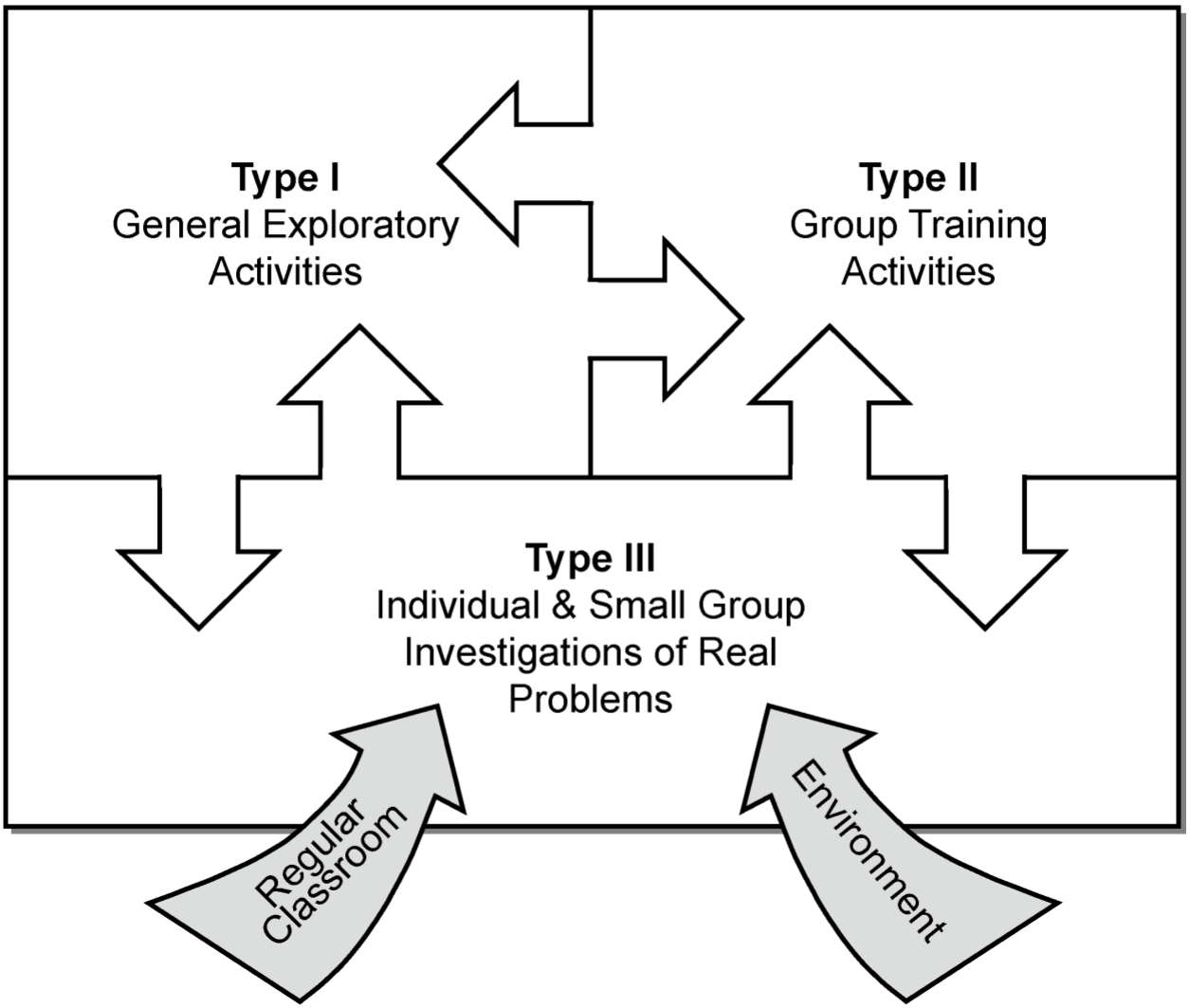
Pedagogy is another word for education, the profession and science of teaching. Pedagogy comes from the Greek paidagōgia, (child or student) plus from paidagōgos (teacher or leader). Pedagogy refers to the teaching profession as the science of education. Many people view education systems around the world as places for knowledge acquisition and skill training. This approach led to a highly controlled curriculum and a prescribed and presented pedagogy that was based mainly on the acquisition, memorization. and repetition of information.

The continued use of this pedagogy minimizes the kinds of 20th Century thinking skills that promote innovation and creative productivity. Many of today's progressive educational leaders, employers, and the corporate and business community are expressing the lowest level ever in history of confidence in public education. And many teachers also experience various levels and types of frustration because excessive control limits their freedom to teach in more creative and engaging ways. Einstein once said that the way something is be taught can best be described as the difference between lightning and a lightning bug!

Although educators have argued for years the pros and cons of gifted program organizational arrangements (e.g., pull out, push in, full time, magnet schools, separate schools), little attention has been devoted to the pedagogy of gifted education—what should actually be going on in any organizational arrangement. Before discussing the pedagogy that I have advocated for almost half a century, I will begin with two issues that have guided my work.

What Is the Purpose of Gifted Education? This frequently asked question can no doubt be debated, but my standard answer has always been: "to increase the reservoir of creative and productive young people who will make innovative contributions to the arts, sciences, and all other areas of human knowledge and productivity." In this regard, I have made a distinction between what I call lesson-learning giftedness and creative productive giftedness. We all know what lesson-learning giftedness is all about—learn the prescribed material, be able to demonstrate your learning by taking a test or through oral, written, artistic, dramatic, or some other form of expression. Creative-productive giftedness, on the other hand, is defined as those aspects of human activity and involvement where a premium is placed on the development of original ideas, material, and products that are purposefully designed to have an impact on one or more target audiences.

Learning situations that are designed to promote creative-productive giftedness emphasize the use and *application* of information (content) and thinking skills in an integrated, inductive, and real-problem-oriented manner. These experiences have been described as Type III Enrichment in my major pedagogical work entitled The Enrichment Triad Model. A more detailed version of the theory can be found in (Renzulli, 2022).



In this "brand" of pedagogy, the role of the student is transformed from that of a learner of prescribed lessons to one in which she or he uses the *modus operandi* of a firsthand inquirer. This approach is quite different from the development of lesson-learning giftedness that tends to emphasize deductive learning, structured curriculum, and the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information. I have been asked on numerous occasions about the definition of Type III Enrichment (described below) What Makes a Problem Real? Creative-productive giftedness is simply putting one's abilities to work on real problems and areas of study that have personal relevance to the student and that can be escalated to appropriately challenging levels of creative and investigative activity. The roles that both students and teachers should play in the pursuit of these problems have been described elsewhere (Renzulli, 1977, 1982) and have been embraced in general education under the concepts such as authentic learning, experiential learning, problem-based learning, and immersive learning. The four characteristics that define an authentic Type III Enrichment experience (as opposed to a teacher-prescribed project) are as follow:

1. Personalization of the problem. First, a real problem requires a personal frame of reference for the individual or group pursuing the problem. In other words, the problem must involve an emotional or internal commitment to action in addition to a cognitive or scholarly interest or

simply wanting to find out more about something. Although teachers or other adults can have some general influence on student choices, the student(s) themselves must decide what they want to study and how they want to study it. This requirement makes Type III Enrichment qualitatively different from the methodology commonly used in today's emphasis on project-based learning.

2. Open-endedness of the problem. A second essential element of real problems is that they do not have a preexisting or unique solutions for the groups or individuals addressing the problem. If an agreed-upon solution or already existing right answer is present, or if a prescribed strategy for solving the problem exists, then it is more appropriately classified as a teacher- assigned training exercise.

3. Use of authentic methodology and advanced content. The third essential element of a real problem is that the problem is addressed using authentic methods that applies advanced content and employing the professional methodology and materials typically used by investigators and creative producers in the various disciplines; even if these processes are applied at a more junior level that adult scientists, writers, artists, etc. We have found that adult professionals can be excellent coaches and mentors in the Type III process and that How-To Books can be excellent resources for providing young people with the professional methodological skills to pursue a problem like a practicing specialist in a given field. For example, a how-book on skills needed to design a questionnaire, rating scale, or interview schedule is an excellent resource for students who might want to do a study on variations in screen time on the parts of different age groups. Please note in the example that follows the four How-To books that the students used to do research on historical buildings.

4. Work is intended for authentic audiences. The final essential element of real problems is that they are directed toward real audiences. Real audiences are a major part of the *raison d'être* of the practicing professional upon which this model of learning and teaching is based. Professionals produce creative products for one or more specific clients and audiences and real audiences consist of people who voluntarily attend to information, events, services, or objects. Contests and competitions such as science fairs and National History Day events, capstone projects, musical and theatrical performances and fund-raising events for community causes also serve as built in audiences.

I do not argue against the role and importance of "regular education;" however, we should also understand that in that the real outside-of-school world, knowledge only has value when we *put it work* to make, change, or produce something that has value for one or more intended audiences.

References

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