

Gifted Children: How Different Are They?

Detlef H. Rost
Lebensumweltanalyse hochbegabter
Kinder das Marburger
Hochbegabtenprojekt
Seattle, WA: Hogrefe, 1993. 261 pp.
ISBN 3-8017-0479-3. DM 78,—
paperback

Review by
Wolfgang Schneider

Detlef H. Rost, professor of psychology at Philipps-University (Marburg, Germany), is executive editor of the German Journal of Educational Psychology (co-edited by A. Knapp). Rost is author of Spatial Ability and Dimensions of Reading Comprehension and editor of Developmental Psychology of Primary School Children and Instructional Psychology for Primary Schools (all in German). ■ Wolfgang Schneider, professor of psychology at the University of Würzburg (Germany), is coauthor, with M. Pressley, of Memory Development Between 2 and 20 and coeditor, with F. E. Weinert, of Interrelations Among Aptitudes, Strategies, and Knowledge in Cognitive Performance.

It is not easy to find an adequate English translation for the title of this book. Perhaps "analysis of gifted children's living circumstances" comes closest to what the editor had in mind. The title indicates that the book deals with a rather broad and heterogeneous category: A closer look at the table of contents reveals that it not only includes family relations, toy possession and use, aspects of children's personality and temperament, and their achievement-related cognitions but also parents' achievement goals, their perception of educational support for gifted children, and the identification of gifted children by teachers.

This book differs from most edited volumes in that it is a documentation of a comprehensive research project directed by the editor. All of the contributors collaborating in this project focus on one or more of the research themes outlined above. The book chapters are very similar in structure: After a short overview of the state of the art of the respective research problem, the authors give a detailed account of the measurement instruments and the methods of data analysis (mostly analyses of variance and exploratory factor analyses) they used to tackle the research problem in question. One obvious advantage of this conception is that one has no problems with reconstructing the details of this research project. However, the repetition of content structure in the various chapters of this book certainly does not add to its interest. I sometimes found it difficult to keep motivated when going

through the individual contributions of this volume.

One of the special merits of the project concerns the selection of samples. In the first step of analysis, more than 7,000 elementary school children were presented with several intelligence tests that tapped different aspects of *g* (i.e., general intelligence). Subjects with extremely high *g* scores ($n = 151$) were kept as the core sample of gifted children and compared to a sample with average IQ scores ($n = 136$). Each child in the comparison sample was matched to a gifted child with regard to school and classroom, and an attempt was made to control for socioeconomic status.

The author's definition of giftedness focusing on *g* certainly deviates from contemporary multidimensional approaches that do not equate giftedness with general intelligence but additionally consider creativity and personality variables like task commitment (e.g., the three-ring conception of giftedness by Renzulli, 1986). However, Rost and colleagues provide sound arguments for their decision to choose *g* as the defining variable, which makes their study comparable to the most impressive longitudinal study with gifted children (i.e., Terman's genetic studies of genius; cf. Sears, 1984).

A second important aspect of this study concerns the sources of information used for data collection: In addition to child test scores and questionnaire data, interview and questionnaire data obtained from parents and teachers on issues like

child personality, family relations, and educational goals were used to validate the results.

What are the most important findings of the study? In my view, the core message of this book is that there are not as many differences between gifted children and their normal counterparts as one might expect. For example, family size and family relations were found to be comparable for both groups, and parents' educational goals differed only slightly. Gifted and normal children possessed and used similar toys, and only a few group differences in temperament were found. The most pronounced between-group differences concerned aspects of personality, in particular, efficacy perceptions and self-concept of ability. In general, gifted children showed a more positive self-concept of ability and perceived less emotional problems than the normal children of the sample. The latter finding nicely replicates results of Terman's study and destroys the myth that gifted children are emotionally unstable.

Overall, the volume is well written. It provides the reader with a large amount of data that are carefully analyzed and adequately interpreted. However, I noted at least three problems with the book. First, I missed a clear-cut theoretical framework for the empirical study. As indicated above, it is difficult to find a common denominator for the various areas included in the project. Whereas the authors gave detailed reasons for their decision to use specific intelligence tests, they were not similarly specific when it came to explaining the choice of the remaining variables.

The second problem I had with the volume concerns the fact that no attempts were made to relate the various theoretical aspects of the study. For example, although possible interrelations between personality and temperament variables were discussed at length, empirical analyses concerning these two constructs were described in separate chapters. From a theoretical point of view, it could have been interesting to explore the commonalities and differences between the temperament and personality measures within the samples of gifted and normal children. Similarly, it seems worthwhile to analyze links between aspects of self-concept, causal attributions, and emotional stability within the two groups. Given the potential of the data, I hope that the authors will follow up these suggestions in subsequent secondary analyses.

Finally, I missed a concluding chapter

integrating the outcomes of the numerous analyses and relating the findings to the existing literature. A closer look at the various chapters shows that the discussion sections are rather short compared with the presentation of results. Thus, an integrative summary chapter could have been helpful in view of the diversity of empirical findings. Despite these problems, however, I recommend the book for all those who are interested in issues of giftedness and its relation to aspects of children's personality, their family experiences, and their educational environment. I find it unfortunate that

an English version of the book is not yet available. It certainly deserves a larger audience.

References

- Renzulli, J. S. (1986). The three-ring conception of giftedness: A developmental model for creative productivity. In R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness* (pp. 53-92). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Sears, R. R. (1984). The Terman gifted children study. In S. A. Mednick, M. Harway, & K. M. Finello (Eds.), *Handbook of longitudinal research* (Vol. 1). New York: Praeger.

Dewey and Bentley, Pepper, Piaget, Gibson, Vygotsky, Leont'ev, Angyal, and Kantor—is that the individual and the environment are inseparable. Rogoff (1982) contrasted the interactional approach (in which person and context are independently defined and the aim is to examine their interaction) and the contextual event approach (in which it is assumed that individuals and contexts are mutually defining, as people participate in contextual events that they both constitute and are constituted by).

In the introductory chapter of this volume, Cohen and Siegel call for the contextual event approach:

Context is a melding of person and environment. Context includes the consideration of persons (conceptualized as active, constructive, information processors, replete with a past history and current sets of agenda, goals, expectations, etc.) as embedded within sets of social relationships (proximal and distal), and within a physical setting (offering behavioral opportunities and constraints), all developing over time. (p. 18)

Cohen and Siegel's proposal is extended by an extremely thoughtful Chapter 2 by Houts, which provides an account of world hypotheses and root metaphors, building on Pepper's approach. Houts discusses strong and weak forms of contextualism and discusses methodological choices that would follow from each. As Houts points out, often the methodological and theoretical approaches espoused by authors (including many in this volume) contradict each other. The methods applied sometimes are less contextual than the conceptualization offered.

The remainder of the book involves a mix of approaches to considering contextual issues. Although many of the chapters are interesting in their own right, the stance that they take with regard to how to conceptualize contextual issues is often implicit rather than discussed as a focus of the chapters. However, through noting how contextual matters are treated empirically or by reference to other work, we infer that a good number of the chapters fit the interactional model. They treat context as an outside influence on individuals, each defined independently of the other. At times, the chapters treat context as an influence on individuals; at other times, they examine bidirectional approaches. However, even very complex systems approaches to bidirectional approaches do not become contextual in the way called for in Cohen and Siegel's and Hout's chapters. They portray a dualistic view, with context as a separate

Dual Approaches to Development in Context

Robert Cohen and Alexander W. Siegel (Eds.)

Context and Development

Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1991. 329 pp.

ISBN 0-8058-0481-1. \$49.95

Review by

Eugene Matusov and Barbara Rogoff

Robert Cohen, professor of psychology at Memphis State University (Tennessee), is editor of *The Development of Spatial Cognition*. ■ Alexander W. Siegel, professor of psychology and director of the training program in developmental psychology at the University of Houston (Texas), is coeditor, with P. R. Costanzo, of a special issue of the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* titled "Social Context, Social Behavior and Socialization." ■ Eugene Matusov, graduate student in psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, is recipient of a Jonathan Jacobs Foundation dissertation fellowship. Matusov is coauthor, with J. Baker-Sennett and B. Rogoff, of the chapters "Sociocultural Processes of Creative Planning in Children's Playcrafting" in P. Light and G. Butterworth (Eds.) *Context and Cognition: Ways of Learning and Knowing* and "Planning as Developmental Process" in H. Reese (Ed.) *Advances in Child Development*, Vol. 24. ■ Barbara Rogoff, professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, served as 1985-1991 editor of the *Newsletter of the Society for Research in Child Development*. Rogoff is author of *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context*; coeditor, with J. Lave, of *Everyday Cognition: Its Development in Social Context*; and coeditor, with J. V. Wertsch, of *Children's Learning in the "Zone of Proximal Development."*

This edited volume aims to advance understanding of how development occurs as a function of the contexts of children's lives. It reflects an increasing interest throughout psychology in exploring how to go beyond focusing exclusively on individuals as the topic of analysis. The issue is a classic one in the field: how to conceptualize the relation between people and the environment. Few would disagree with the premise that the context matters. The question is one of how to conceptualize its relationship with the individual. The authors of

Context and Development—developmental, cross-cultural, family, and educational psychologists—present a collection of ways that the problem of context and development is pursued in different areas of psychology.

The relation between individual and context has been handled prototypically by conceiving of the person and the environment as independent entities, with one acting on the other, or with bidirectional influence. An alternative that has been less easily assimilated in psychology—proposed by scholars such as