

RE-ENVISIONING SPACES STRIVING FOR INCLUSION THROUGH THE THEORY OF
POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

by

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Abstract

As the definition of inclusion broadens from supporting and accommodating for students with special needs to embracing the diversity and learning needs of all students, classrooms striving for inclusion are faced with mounting expectations of what it means to be inclusive. In this inquiry, students identified as gifted and learning support teachers explored Kazimierz Dabrowski's theory of positive integration, to see whether it offered a new perspective on how they saw themselves and others within these spaces. Dabrowski's theory revolves around the role of emotion in personality development and posits that some forms of psychoneurosis, including anxiety and depression, may in fact be signs of developmental potential and requiring support of a different kind. Using the 4D cycle of appreciative inquiry (discovery, dream, design, and destiny), participants explored possibilities for building and expanding on the strengths that already exist in our spaces striving for inclusion and designed potential pathways for individual and collective change that would enhance their own, and the experience of others within spaces striving for inclusion with their new understanding of the role of emotions in development. Increased opportunities for autonomy, flexibility, and creativity emerged as essential elements in supporting emotional expressions and their role in personality development.

Dedication

Complementarity: the idea that there can be more than two ways of looking at a quantum system, each of them equally valid, but with the property that you can't employ them simultaneously.

(Carroll, 2019, pp. 74-75)

Some people believe that equality provides the strongest foundation for a relationship, but it has taken me a long time to realize that we all experience our relationships differently whether in the way that we demonstrate love or through the gifts we have to offer the other. To suggest that there is some way to measure that and maintain a balance in the name of equality defies both logic and emotion. I have been lucky to have the most amazing companion on the journey of discovering what can be experienced and achieved when an understanding of complementarity underscores the commitment one has to another. It took us a while to find our groove, both of us distracted by ideas of marriage that we observed both among our family and peers as well as popular culture. But eventually we began to understand that it was our differences from each other and the world around us that not only made us stronger but offered us a deeper understanding of each other and who we hoped to become. Never was it more evident than when we made the decision that it was important for me to pursue a PhD. I told him many times that by the time it was over we should both convocate and we could be Dr. and Dr. Picard.

Mark is present in every aspect of our dissertation. He never missed a beat in filling in his own unique ways, the spaces that I left empty when studies took me away from our home. When I lost my perspective about why I was pursuing my questions, he reminded me of why it was important to continue. When I worried about whether we could manage it financially, he never

blinked an eye. When I needed someone to listen to what I had written, he offered honest feedback, always intrigued and expanding on what I was learning and bringing into our lives. When he got sick and the world as we knew it began to disintegrate, he insisted that I continue, letting me know that completing the work was as important to him as it was to me. As the cancer slowly stole parts of his ability to communicate through speech, his optimism and dreams for our family never faltered, making us hopeful long after the medical establishment had given up. And on the days that were the most difficult, he was the one who reminded us how lucky we were, to have had what we had, including the possibilities for the future, which he was not certain would include him. His courage in knowing how to move forward when everything we believed to be strong revealed itself to be more fragile than what might have been imagined will guide the dissemination of any knowledge that was gathered on this journey.

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Prologue: One Last Anthem

It was during my time as a master's student that I learned to trust the songs. At that time, nearly twenty years ago, they were a fundamental aspect of my hermeneutic inquiry into exploring the tension between the pedagogical relationship and the formal curriculum, helping me find my way through the various aspects of the research, providing a blueprint with which to organize and construct my thoughts. I followed them intuitively, knowing that they appeared when I was ready, weaving together the various aspects of my research. The result was a concert and album of songs that wove together the understory from which the thesis emerged. For years, I kept what I had learned through my research close at hand through a soundtrack that helped me to navigate life, in particular my role as teacher. When I started a new job in a new school district, the words from "There are Borders Here" (Picard, 2002) topped the playlist in my brain. *"Sometimes I walk down halls, sometimes I open doors, sometimes I make a friend, sometimes I start a war, there are borders here and I can't see them all..."* (p. 139). As I struggled to find my place as coordinator of gifted programming and building the new program in my district, I could hear, *"She sleeps uneasy her thoughts they will not rest, even though she reminds them that she's done her best, Still they play out scenarios, and they fabricate plots, Until she doubts who she is and only knows what she's not..."* (p. 133). Luckily, the bridge was there to pull me through: *"Once in a while, yeah you know it in an instant, you somehow manage to negotiate the distance..."* and those moments came. And then there was my mantra, *"I gotta start small... think big... stand tall..."* (p. 143) which worked pretty well... until it didn't, and I began to hear a new song:

Where are you now oh heart that would not break?

Did you find your path to glory with a faith they couldn't shake?

Where are you now? Oh dream that wouldn't die?

Did you mask your firm intention with a shield that could not lie?

*While I sit with the pieces of everything that broke
The hearts that deserved better, the fires left in smoke
The words that never left my lips and all the ones that did
Only to fall short of the promises I made
Where are you now?*

*Where are you now oh truth that would prevail?
Did your feather find its mark riding a shaft that couldn't fail?
Where are you now oh hope that wouldn't flinch?
Did you run a solid mile in the hearts that gave an inch?*

*Now I wait with the fragments of all that came undone
The heroes without stories and the prizes never won
The beauty left uncherished and pain left unclaimed
All waiting for a chance to heal the world that never came
Where are you now?*

***If we gather up the pieces could we reconcile the flame
With the faith that shattered hope and the dream that lost its claim?
Or should we sift through all the fragments for the words that missed their mark
Then expiate a prayer as we build another ark?***

*Where are you now, oh light to fill the crack?
Did they trade you for some gold so they could have their vessel back?
Where are you now, oh tears to ease the pain
Did they catch you in a bottle and brand you with their shame?*

*Who will claim the wreckage from the new course to be cast?
When the next prodigious standard lies tattered on the mast
Will a song rise from the tempest, like a late September gale
And blare until it finds a refuge in another sail...
Where are you now?*

Chapter One: Outside In

We tend to absorb findings about the universe intellectually. We learn some new facts about time or unified theories or black holes. It momentarily tickles the mind, and if sufficiently impressive it sticks. The abstract nature of science often leads us to dwell on its content cognitively, and only then, and then only rarely, does that understanding have a chance of touching us viscerally. But on the occasions when science does conjure both reason and emotion, the result can be powerful. (Greene, 2020, p. 13)

There is a conversation I had with a student a number of years ago, about the similarities between songwriting and theoretical physics. The details of the conversation have faded with time, but I do remember articulating that my hope as a songwriter was to not only come to an understanding by describing some aspect of life, but write and share it in a way that made it available to others. I recall he had a similar interest in M-theory, I believe drawn to the idea, if memory serves me correctly, that the ultimate goal of a physicist is to find the theory that makes sense of the other theories and render the universe comprehensible. That made me reflect on my dream of writing just one song that would have that same kind of resonance. More than anything else about that conversation, I remember feeling enlivened by the connection we found between our two areas of interest. In the years after, I began to mine the world of physics and cosmology for ideas to add depth to my songs, and in that process, I fostered a fascination with the inner workings of our universe.

Werner Heisenberg wrote that “the same organizing forces that have created nature in all its forms, are responsible for the structure of our soul, and likewise for our capacity to think” (in van Loben Sels, 2004, p. 14) and so it feels as though I have the blessing of the illuminator of the uncertainty principle to move forward with this metaphorical pairing for my thesis. It thrills me

to no end that the computations that have made the understanding of general relativity and quantum physics possible are far beyond my grasp as a mathematician, make perfect sense to me as a songwriter and in that way, contribute a scientific piece to my work.

I am a songwriter; or rather, I utilize songwriting to enable me to make sense of the world and find order in the chaos of an overactive mind. Most often, they emerge from ideas and situations that I am grappling with, though I have been known to write many songs celebrating love, family, community and the power of the forces of nature, all with an effort to make the complexities of life a little more comprehensible. I know that I am not the first songwriter to be fascinated with the cosmos or emotions for that matter, and throughout my research and writing process, songs that encompassed both emerged, offering an organizing force through which to construct my work; these songs punctuate my dissertation, offering breaks in the more intellectual processing and academic writing, time and space for reflection, bridges between realms of science and psychology, emotion and logic as well as some relief from the academic voice that can only be heard correctly in contrasts.

It was through song that I came to know how the principles that guide our understanding of general relativity offer a metaphoric lens for Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration and that quantum mechanics offers fascinating insight into inclusion. At first, I was confused as I expected that in attempting to understand and appreciate the role of emotions in development, we would be diving into the quantum realms. Instead I discovered an enormous universe of possibilities within the human psyche, complete with celestial bodies and gravitational waves. It was within the spaces striving for inclusion where I discovered similar dilemmas faced by physicists working at a quantum level to understand particles so small, that they are barely comprehensible.

“The fact that the past takes no definite form means that observations you make on a system in the present affects its past” (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010, p. 82) means that I have to choose one of many songs that led me to understand the nature of the problem I was encountering. It was here that I began to feel a gravitational push and pull as I worked with students and sought to understand their experience in the universe.

*Oh she turns the world outside in
 ‘Til the forest burns beneath her skin
 And every word is a grain of sand
 Digging in, digging in, digging in
 Digging in, digging in, digging in
 And her heart is an ocean with an ebb and flow
 And you’re just a moon who doesn’t know
 Where to wait to see where the tide will go
 Coming in, coming in, coming in
 Coming in, coming in, coming in*

*And pretty bows won’t make the dirt brown hair more beautiful
 And neon tights, won’t hide the knees that refuse to bend
 Outside in*

There are students you never forget because they change the way you see the world. My “Outside In” girl was one of those students. Identified as gifted at a young age, misunderstood by students and teachers alike, brilliant in ways that were not comprehensible to most, she struggled to find her place in the world. As she wrestled with the intensity of her emotions, I endeavoured to understand her better and seek out supports, and that process led me to explore what kept those of us working with her from truly seeing and understanding her.

*And her hope can’t breathe when her lungs are full
 Of exhausting fumes from methane bulls
 Who don’t understand that the world can’t hold*

More disciplines, disciplines, disciplines
Disciplines, disciplines, disciplines
So she throws her pebbles into glassy lakes
Where the ripples spread like small earthquakes
“Til she triggers a landscape to obliterate
Her sins, her sins, her sins
Her sins, her sins, her sins

And pretty bows won't make the dirt brown hair more beautiful
And neon tights, won't hide the knees that refuse to bend
Outside in

Dissonance emerged for me as I sat in team meetings where we discussed behaviour plans, first for her and over the years for so many other students. I began to question whether we had the right, or even the know-how to adequately understand many of our students who are struggling. Whether the issue was having a complete emotional meltdown, destroying their own or others work, shouting out obscenities at the world around them or simply running to escape the classroom, behaviour plans and emotional regulation felt woefully inadequate with teachers often sharing they were ineffective despite their best efforts. Too often, what was implemented felt like guesswork, suspecting trauma or some form of cognitive deficiency as the root cause. As more and more struggling students were brought to my attention, some of them identified as gifted and others not, I began exploring ways to gain a better understanding of what I was observing.

The answer's waiting way out there
To find it she will have to tear
Through every truth that's held on to
Its shaky bit of ground
She'll hold each one to her breast
And wear it like a Kevlar vest

*And while her heart leaps in her chest
She'll test the weight of the world.*

In my early twenties, long before I had ever heard of Kazimierz Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration, (TPD) I had a major disintegrative experience. My description at the time was much cruder than Dabrowski's theory: life taking a massive swing at the identity I had created out of the values I'd been given and smashing it into smithereens and then leaving me to pick up the pieces and figure out which ones I would need to create a new, better version of myself. This was a long process that included years of creative soul searching as a singer/songwriter, scratching out my existential crises in an enormous number of notebooks and nonchalantly selecting a few to work out on guitar so I could spring them on the unsuspecting public in an attempt to find kindred spirits. I took up teaching to support this habit and was eventually introduced to the work of Dabrowski after inadvertently stumbling into the world of gifted education.

At first, I shrugged off the theory as being rather obvious—if I had figured out a version for myself, certainly it could not be that complicated—and left it at that. But when I became the gifted coordinator for my school district, charged with educating students, teachers, and parents on what constituted giftedness, I found myself revisiting the theory. The checklists that we were using to help identify students for assessment reflected the overexcitabilities found in the theory, but many of those exhibiting overexcitabilities were not testing as gifted. At the same time, many students who were gifted did not exhibit those same overexcitabilities. Slowly the question emerged as to whether we have an adequate understanding of the role of emotions in development and whether the practices that we use to support inclusion, may in fact be making it more difficult for many students.

...sadness, drama, and tragedy are intimate aspects of human fate and experience and it therefore becomes necessary that individuals receive appropriate preparation for this side of life through a proper shaping of the reflective mechanisms through which they view these experiences. This is particularly important if proper cultural development is to occur. (Dabrowski, n.d., p. 18)

When viewing emotional responses through the lens of the TPD, the transformation of not only the behavior, but the individual is profound. Considering the possibility, that intense emotional responses might signal an individual in the process of discovering their own hierarchy of values and determining who it is they would like to become, forces us to consider what might be happening on the outside to create so much dissonance within many students.

*Oh she turns the world outside in
 ‘Til the forest burns beneath her skin
 And every word is a grain of sand
 Digging in, digging in, digging in
 Digging in, digging in, digging in...*

A Theory to Make Sense of Them All

M-theory is the only model that has all the properties we think a final theory ought to have... M-theory is not a theory in the usual sense. It is a whole family of different theories, each of which is a good description of observations only in some range of physical situations. (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010, p. 8).

I have often worried that a complete understanding of the universe, or M-theory, would signal the end of everything, driven perhaps by the idea that too much knowledge can be dangerous and that there should be mystery in the world. And while knowledge can be put

to uses that do not serve all equally, the danger of a mystery lies in many of those who claim to be acting on its behalf. In the constantly evolving world of the classroom it sometimes feels like we leap from one theory to another looking for that one simple strategy that will make all the difference, and when it works we are hopeful that we have stumbled on a new found truth. The frustration comes when new situations arise that confound what we thought we knew after we have already become invested, sometimes financially, in what came before.

The purpose of this study is not to unravel any kind of mystery, or make any claim to knowledge, but rather to explore whether the lens of TPD helps us to see things differently when we look at ourselves and others in classrooms striving for inclusion. And if the theory does give us a new perspective, what can we identify that might mitigate some of the personal and interpersonal struggles experienced by ourselves and others in those same spaces as we move forward in time?

Questions such as the following began to emerge: How might the “depathologizing” of emotional expressions influence how students think and feel about themselves? How might an understanding of disintegration as a process of considering and creating a hierarchy of values, offer them insight into their relationships with others? What features of and/or practices within inclusive spaces support personality development through positive disintegration?

Exploring Significance of the Inquiry Through Relative Terms

Striving for Inclusive Spaces

Alberta Learning’s Inclusive Education Policy (2015) defines inclusion as a “way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all children and students” maintaining that “all children and students (Kindergarten to Grade 12), regardless of

race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, or any other factor(s), have access to meaningful and relevant learning experiences that include appropriate instructional supports” (p. 25). While it appears as though no one could be left out of an Alberta classroom, I am left wondering whether it is enough to simply open the door to everyone who knocks as a gesture of universal acceptance. Some would argue that a “claim to universality can no longer be sustained” (Sefa Dei, 2013, p. 33) as “the notion of universality” has been “recreated from the archives of knowledge and systems, rules, and values of colonialism” (Ermine, 2007, p. 198) where “systematic ignorance has accompanied the production of systematic knowledge” (Harding, 1996, p. 445). Inclusion is not simply a question of access to learning spaces but a re-envisioning of how the learning spaces themselves need to be transformed so that those within them can become “beings for themselves” (Freire, 1990, p. 61) whose value is not determined by success in a system that was not designed for those it now attempts to include. As curriculum is being rewritten to reflect the changing landscape of our classrooms (Alberta Learning, 2017), now is the time to consider what forms and ways of knowing may need to be considered as we explore how learning and inclusivity occur in our classrooms. When referring to schools or settings striving for inclusion, it is toward this intent and consideration I am referring.

Gifted Education

Exploring inclusion through the lens of gifted education offers a unique vantage point. The work of Dai and Chen (2013) highlights a “lack of agreement on the conceptual and operational definition of giftedness” (p. 151), exposing current paradigmatic differences with regard to whether gifted programs, that seek to be included in the educational landscape, should focus on talent development, differentiation, or viewing giftedness as a “pervasive influence on

one's life" (p. 154). The talent development and differentiation paradigms separate themselves from the third conception of giftedness by viewing inclusion as an opportunity to achieve something that is quantifiable, one to which the system can be held to account. While all three paradigms use similar psychometric measurements to identify students, the third paradigm suggests that there is more to giftedness than an IQ score that predicts potential achievement. This quantifiable difference from the norm could also mean that differences in "ways of thinking, social-emotional characteristics, educational needs and developmental trajectories and pathways" (p. 155) could be qualitatively different from the norm as well, requiring a different kind of inclusive support.

Differences in paradigms notwithstanding, gifted education has struggled with its identity, due in part to the extensive use of quantitative testing, which has often been "negatively implicated in the practice of individual testing that have been used to justify certain students' educational separation and exclusion" (Kershner, 2016, p. 114) especially when IQ scores are interpreted through a lens inscribing assets or deficits. A perception of unearned assets has confused the discourse on giftedness despite the work to eliminate the influences of biological determinists from the history of psychological testing (Gould, 1996). New directions in psychology suggest that we may be ready for a "conceptual change" that "transcend[s] biological constraints" (Kershner, 2016, p. 132). How might this be reflected in the paradigmatic differences in the field of gifted education? Urquhart (2009) writes that "both Piaget and Vygotsky recognized that emotion and cognition were 'indissociable' as Piaget put it, and both acknowledged that to separate cognition from emotion gave a false impression of the cognitive process" (p. 67). Exploring a psychological theory focusing on how emotion drives personality development would be helpful not only in addressing how we understand giftedness but also in

how this might impact learning spaces where an underlying focus on achievement favours cognition over emotion.

Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration

There are four key aspects to Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration (TPD) that differentiate it from other theories of personality development and the role of emotions in them. (Ackerman, 2009). The theory positions personality development as non-ontogenetic and not tied to physical maturity meaning that within traditional age groupings, we could have many levels of development. For example, a child could have a higher level of development than the significant adults in their lives. Dabrowski also saw emotions as playing a key developmental role, which could mean that programs we are currently employing to regulate emotions could, to some measure, be suppressing development. TPD also upends our current understanding of mental illness where anxiety and depression are pathologized and medicalized without consideration of their developmental possibilities. And finally, it offers insight into how a personal hierarchy of values could be informing an individual's goals and actions at different levels of development. To understand where the theory intersects with classroom practice, Dabrowski (1973) described three factors as key to positive development. The first factor is one's hereditary or innate qualities, the second focuses on one's environment, and the third lies within one's "acceptance of those values which are closer to the ideal of personality and in the rejection of those values which are farther from the ideal" (p. 76). While the third factor suggests positive disintegration is a highly individual process, the importance of the second factor cannot be underscored enough, particularly as it is where we, in education, have the opportunity to act.

Dabrowski (n.d.) wrote that "we should elaborate a complete system of education in which would be contained a program of individual development utilizing all positive elements of

disintegration for the development of the individual and his creativity, while at the same time introducing prophylactic forces against negative disintegration and psychosis” (p. 52) indicating the key role educators play in emotional development. Dabrowski (1973) describes prophylactic forces as giving the child the opportunity “to put his experiences in order, to somehow synthesize them, and eventually to adjust to the future difficulties of life” but only “after being pacified, soothed and saturated by the experiences of warmth which provide him with new ‘developmental resources’ ”(p. 72), indicating the importance of an environment receptive to understanding and supporting emotional responses.

Assumptions and Complexities

Just as there is no flat map that is a good representation of the earth’s entire surface, there is no single theory that is a good representation of observations in all situations.

(Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010, p. 8)

By conducting qualitative research, I am acting on the assumption that we are in a fluid process of creating/recreating/co-creating imagining/reimagining the world. Choosing appreciative inquiry there is the further assumption that through a carefully constructed inquiry that focuses on discovering what gives ‘life’ to a living system, we can discover strengths which can be a start to positive change (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p.3). In taking this approach to explore the utility of a TPD lens within classrooms striving for inclusion by casting a positive gaze on the role emotion plays in development, I make the assumption that knowledge can be expressed through resonance, assonance, and dissonance: resonance in the degree to which the various aspects of the theory are reflected in the co-researchers’ experiences and perceptions; assonance with respect to any themes or patterns that may emerge; and finally dissonance, in the way that the co-researchers may struggle with how and what is shared.

There are several complexities to the research. First, despite inclusive education “evol[ing] from a story about *children with special needs* to a story about inclusive schools and inclusive learning environments for *children with all kinds of physical, cognitive and social backgrounds*” (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2017, p. 803) what is understood to be inclusive practice is by no means universal. To reflect the evolving nature of our understanding of the term, in this inquiry, I refer to educational spaces as striving for inclusion as an attempt to address the variability of both students and teachers within those spaces. The degree to which they are striving may also be variable. There is, however, an expectation set by the Government of Alberta (2020) that as educators we take responsibility for all learners through inclusive practices that respond to the needs of the students in our schools and classrooms supporting the assumption that teachers are striving for inclusion within their classrooms.

Second, in a similar way, the student co-researchers recruited for this study are not referred to as gifted but rather as identified as gifted, a label (in our province a code 80) that enabled them to participate in the gifted programming offered by my school district. It is important to note that not only has the way in which we identified students for the program evolved over the years, but the process of identification may differ considerably from other jurisdictions, underpinning inherent difficulties in gifted research: lack of agreement on definitions of giftedness as well as a lack of “standards governing, organizing and coordinating research efforts” (Dai & Chen, 2013, p. 151). Given that gifted programming in our district is not full time and that students are invited to voluntarily participate in programming, the co-researchers’ experiences of both a congregated and inclusive setting in addition to carrying a gifted label entitling them to classroom accommodations, offers them a unique perspective on inclusion.

In looking at the application of the TPD to school settings, it is also important to remember that Dabrowski (1972) did not believe everyone had developmental potential but did feel that the overexcitabilities, one of the signs of developmental potential were more likely to be found among artists and the gifted. His worry was that psychoneurotic expressions which he described as “disquietude, astonishment, anxiety, or dissatisfaction with oneself, feelings of inferiority regarding oneself, fear, guilt, certain obsessive or ecstatic conditions, exaggerated control of oneself, strong introvertive tendencies” (p. 1) would not be understood as potential positive change happening within the inner milieu. In this inquiry, it makes sense to see if the theory finds resonance among those who Dabrowski felt it would most likely impact. It is my hope that through the introduction of this theory, the co-researchers, who are identified as gifted and included in both congregated and ‘inclusive’ settings or as well as teachers working with struggling students, might see broader applications. It has been repeated many times that though untested, Dabrowski believed “that about 70% of the population were confined to Level 1” (Piechowski, 2012, p. 12), which indicates that 30% of the population is likely to experience some form of disintegration, far beyond the percentages included in gifted programs.

Songwriter's Guide to the Universe: Dissertation Overview

I remember as a child, before discovering songwriting, how I became passionate about writing poems that I could share with my mother about how I perceived the world around me. She generally had one of two reactions; the first was motherly concern: “Susan are you okay?” I came to understand that not everyone explored the darkness that surrounded them, and that in fact, many were not even aware of it and those who were, were reluctant to delve into its mysteries. I loved to write about it and I was proud of how I could weave words into lifeboats that carried me through the shadows that I seemed to encounter regularly. As I grew more

thoughtful and experimental with my word selection, my mother would sometimes react with confusion in my attempts to elicit many levels of meaning from each choice, hoping to load the lyric with the massive amount of meaning that I saw in everything. “Why don’t you focus on one thing?” she would lovingly ask. In retrospect, I can see in her question the amazing ability she had, and continues to have, to live life fully in the moment.

Brady (2005) on reflecting what it means to ‘be-in place’ writes that “poetry addresses the long run by allowing for diverse particulars in accounting for events of the moment in forms that tap into the larger continuities and commonalities of being human” (p. 991) which meant it was often hard for me to be in the moment. But why would someone want to be when the “ultimate aim of poetic expression is to touch the universal through the particular, to evoke and enter into discourse about the sublime, to move the discourse to what defines us all—what we share as humans” (p. 998)? What may have begun in my early years as an effort to compose anthems for change has, over time, evolved into the delicate process that now informs my songwriting process. The act of lovingly crafting lifeboats that offer shelter in the middle of the complexities (dissonance) of the human experience, offering to carry myself and any listeners through the storm to a place where despite our difference, not only are we are not alone (assonance), but more deeply connected than we could have imagined (resonance).

The discovery and eventual exploration of Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration, helped me perceive my songs, myself and my students in a new way. I fell in love with the disillusioned, the disengaged, the disenchanting as much as the dreamers, visionaries, academics and artists, seeing in them all in the throes of becoming, struggling with what often appeared to them as imposed expectations from arbitrarily distributed authority, often pathologized in the process. When I first encountered someone with a diagnosed mental illness in a personal

relationship in my early twenties, I was more curious than afraid, drawn to understand how his thought processes worked, shaken by the degree to which there was very little knowledge and support beyond pathologizing his condition.

Tillier (2018) tells us that Dabrowski advanced an idea of mental health that was not “defined simply by the presence or absence of symptoms” but concerned with the constructs necessary for individuals to conceptualize what could be alongside “the potential of the individual to achieve [these] desirable developmental qualities” (p. 2). That Dabrowski concluded “socialization and individual development are incompatible” (p. 3) suggests that we spend considerable time treating mental issues that are a response to the limits we impose in order to achieve comfort and security for the group, leaving the group fearful of difference, something I observed firsthand.

What is lost in the exchange for security and comfort has always been a source of curiosity for me, connecting it intuitively with sustainability, and the idea that a healthy ecosystem achieves balance through heterogeneity and that we should be drawn to the dissonance as a signal to the larger society of something out of balance, not something wrong. It was my experience as a social worker that led me to an intuitive understanding of critical theory (Freire, 1990) directing me to contemplate who sets the limits for whom, and working as a crisis counselor in a women’s shelter that led me to feminist theorists (Ahmed, 2015) urging me to dig a little deeper into aspects of self and knowing that may have been pathologized in order to accredit and maintain authority. As a teacher, constructivism shifted my gaze into the classroom striving for inclusion, where the impact of all these issues play out in the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978/1997) and how we influence and are influenced by those around us who may or may not ascribe to the limits that have been set out as necessary for learning. As a researcher, I began to

recognize how the pairing of appreciative inquiry and the TPD would offer me a lens with which to focus on the role of emotion in development through exploring the narratives that emerge from these spaces.

In utilizing astrophysics as a metaphor for this exploration, I was able to access a much broader conception of space and time to help map out the impact of emotion as it directs development in spaces striving for inclusion. In **Chapter One**, the song *Outside In* brings to life my observations of what it means to live with overexcitabilities in a world that does not always understand the significance of one's response to stimulus. It underscores how a new understanding through Dabrowski's TPD could expose the complexities of the inner milieu, and the importance of how we respond to the ways its activation manifests outwardly. It hints at how over the course of this inquiry we might discover how similar perplexities physicists encounter in finding compatibility between general relativity and quantum physics (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010) might be reflected and resolved in what we see happening in classrooms striving for inclusion through an appreciative TPD lens.

In **Chapter Two**, the song *Finding Gravity* captures the longing we have for something to hold us fast in a vast universe and how the elusive understanding of gravity might be reflected in our lack of attention to the developmental role of emotion. That gravity is considered the weakest force in the universe yet has undeniably shaped our lives (Clegg, 2012) calls me to consider how emotion might be similar to both the gravitational wave from a distant supernova that gently pulls at us as it flows through our bodies and the monstrous appetite Impey (2019) explores within Einstein's black holes. The literature gathered identifies how our understanding of emotions is currently missing from our discussions around the difficulties of inclusion, in

addition to highlighting what still needs to be explored in the application and operationalizing of Dabrowski's TPD.

The song *Black Holes* in **Chapter Three** describes the type of vessel or more aptly the methodology one would require to explore the dark reaches within the vast expanse of the inner milieu. Within this song is the first hint at the connection between our deepest fears and how they manifest in larger issues when confronted with disproportionate responses from the outer world. The invitation to share stories with the assurance that any emergent shadows will be mediated through an appreciative filter makes it possible to see the light that creates those same shadows. The 4D cycle of discovery, dreaming, design and destiny (Cooperrider, Stavros, & Whitney, 2008) turns the process into an adventure fueled by optimism and possibilities that does not avoid the difficult complexities that often distort the beauty of our capacity to experience emotion and its connection to the hierarchy of values that help shape who it is we hope to become.

In **Chapter Four**, *The Unwritten Song* speaks to how the experience of collecting data through the generous profound sharing and thoughtful consideration of my co researchers will enliven my steps as I endeavour to negotiate an uncertain future. In this chapter, the process of exploring Dabrowski's TPD with an eye to how it might help us re-envision inclusive spaces has been recorded carefully in an effort to highlight the insights shared by my co researchers as they reflected on their own and then one another's experiences in spaces striving for inclusion. It contains provocative propositions for the future that have emerged from identifying the features and practices within those same spaces that offered support on their journey toward who it was they hoped to become. Within these narratives, I also observed how the student researchers recognized the differences in their experiences, as well as a growing awareness of the uniqueness

of one another's hierarchy of values. It reflected what led physicists to consider a theory of ManyWorlds (Carroll, 2019) to explain the unpredictability of particles at a quantum level, suggesting that what they might be seeing is the effect of independent worlds coexisting alongside one another, yet operating under different sets of universal laws.

The song *Never Enough* introduces **Chapter Five** and the research findings from my teacher participants. In describing three distinctly different versions of success based on what Dabrowski might describe as unilevel or lacking a hierarchy of values (Tillier, 2018, p.175) the song is narrated through the voice of someone who, had they had a mentor early in life that understood the TPD, may have experienced a positive rather than negative disintegration. Drawn from my experiences as an income security social worker, it encapsulates what drew me to education, and the search to find how we can truly be most effective as educators. Once again, the recording of the research findings works to highlight the insights of the teachers, revealing more worlds within worlds as the teacher participants became aware of the impact of their own hierarchy of values on those of their students. From this comes a growing awareness of the impact of broad policies on the ManyWorlds present in our classroom and how a lack of understanding of what might be happening at a quantum level is interfering with what we would aspire classrooms striving for inclusion to be. This takes us back to the similarity between the incompatibility of socialization and independent development and the incompatibility of general relativity and quantum mechanics.

Chapter Six is littered with songs acting as lifeboats as the unpredictability of life inserted a disintegrating black hole into the middle of my life and inquiry. In navigating the devastation of my husband's glioblastoma diagnosis, the short six months leading up to his death, as well as timelessness of these months that have followed it, several songs carry me as I

explore a number of Dabrowski's (1973) dynamisms in an effort to understand the battle between logic and emotion as they attempt to mediate the sometimes debilitating grief I am experiencing in the process of this disintegration. Greene (2020) reminds us of the discomfoting reality that exists even within the vast expanses of time and space: the only certainty is death and all that allows us to function in the face of that grim reality is our ability to obscure it through the variety of approaches we employ in celebrating life and creating meaning. When suffering uncovers the reality of the impermanence of everything around us, finding tiny bits of light that have the potential to illuminate the way out of that darkness without losing the possibility of who it is we might yet become is challenging and requiring me to cultivate a relationship with sorrow as time pushes me forward.

The final song *Into the Dark* in **Chapter Seven**, explores the impact of entropy on scientific discovery and the sharing of stories as the wave function facilitates the creation of multiples of ManyWorlds far beyond the computational capacities of most humans (Carroll, 2019). The polarizing effect created by those who wish to ride the wave and those who attempt to reverse it, creates a multitude of disintegrative black holes for which there is no remedy beyond entering in. In reviewing the findings of the researchers as they viewed spaces striving for inclusion through the TPD lens: autonomy, flexibility and creativity, in service to a hierarchy of values, emerged as elemental in the process of guiding the intensity/density of our emotion into a productive and life-giving force necessary for sustainability in light of our own impermanence.

Recreating History

We create history by our observation, rather than history creating us. (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010, p. 140)

The elements of the universe that have been revealed to us over time through the additional lenses of optical, radio, infrared, microwave and other types of telescopes, have rewritten how we have come to understand not only the origins of the universe, but all the forces involved in bringing us to this particular moment in time. In employing a top down method of exploring the universe, backward from the present time implies the possibility that “there will be different histories for different possible states of the universe at the present time” (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010, p. 140). In a similar way, exploring our individual and collective histories through a series of lenses has the capacity to offer us insight into who we are at this present state, and in determining and responding to the laws that govern these different versions of history, offer us the opportunity to guide our own, and through that our collective futures. Critical theorist Freire (1992) writes that “in our making and remaking of ourselves in the process of making history-as subjects and objects, persons, becoming beings of insertion in the world and not of pure adaptation to the world-we should end by having the *dream*, too, a mover of history. There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope” (p. 77). Does the TPD have the ability to make comprehensible the complexity of the inner milieu as it responds to emotion and how it impacts the ways in which we engage with the outer world we are navigating?

*The answer's waiting way out there
To find it she will have to tear
Through every truth that's held on to
Its shaky bit of ground*

*She'll hold each one to her breast
And wear it like a Kevlar vest
And while her heart leaps in her chest
She'll test the weight of the world.*

Perhaps I am not unlike the student/song that inspired me toward the first tentative steps of this journey, though I believe that my focus may have shifted from seeking answers to finding a way of being that can exist peacefully in a world that doesn't always supply comforting answers.

Chapter Two: Finding Gravity

The warping of space and time leads to all kinds of wonderful possibilities like time travel and wormholes in space. And we can have great fun playing around with the potential for anti-gravity devices, and all the glorious conspiracy theories that surround those. But in the end, for me, what is most important is that simplicity that Feynman identified. It crops up first in Newton's discovery of the scale of gravitational force and then in Einstein's replacing that mystical force at a distance with the satisfying solidity of warped space-time. (Clegg, 2012, p. 286)

*I can see a million stars
As tiny photons pierce the dark
Sent out from a beacon
A billion light years away
Riding on this wobbly rock
A tiny speck on a blue dot
A quantum leap and long shot
To know what is and what is not*

*Never sure which one is home
Where my feet land or my head roams
Or whether being lost
Is worse than being found
Hold me,
Just hold me,
Hold me,
All night long
Oh hold me,
Just hold me,
Hold me,*

All night long...

In his book *Tunesmith*, Webb (1998) recommends that to find your muse you might benefit from some kind of a pilgrimage—anything from walking across a continent, a visit to your hometown, or even experimenting with another medium. Something that not only gives the mind a rest but gives you the opportunity to resist trying to conquer the problem head on, perhaps seeing it through another discipline (p. 18). Taking this to heart, I have been on a sojourn, enlisting physicists and cosmologists to guide me through the universe to see whether general relativity or quantum mechanics can help me understand the struggles we have with inclusion.

“Inclusive education isn’t living up to its name, expert says” (CBC, 2020), the headline reads, and though the story focuses on an outdated framework from another province, it’s the headline that twitters its way across the country to me, and I click on it, recognizing that it is a sentiment I have heard expressed in hallways and classrooms, not just in frustration, but with genuine concern. For a moment, I wonder how the speed of a single headline through the twitterverse compares to the speed of light and wonder if perhaps it is our fascination with speed that gives us a false impression of what is working and what is not. If there is anything to be learned from cosmology, it is that some things, like time, can only be understood when we consider them in a grand scale of the universe.

In much the same way, one child or one classroom of children cannot give us an overall picture of whether inclusive education is working or not, though it can be those single cases that make us stand back and ask questions. If inclusion is about including individuals despite their differences, what happens on an individual or quantum level is just as important as understanding what happens on a global or even universal level. Why am I not surprised when Brian Greene (1999) points out that “the two theories underlying the tremendous progress of

physics during the last hundred years—progress that has explained the expansion of the heavens and the fundamental structure of matter—are mutually incompatible” (p. 3)? Perhaps it is due to the number of team conferences in which I have sat where what the individual student needs is at odds with how the classroom operates. In those moments, there is the temptation to vilify one or the other to satisfy my own need for coherence, knowing, however, that at a fundamental level, we have not yet bridged the gap between the two. We have choices Greene points out. We could “requir[e] one set of laws when things are large and a different, incompatible set when things are small” (p. 4), something that is echoed in educational language that speaks of differentiation and individualized programming geared toward all students experiencing success and achievement. Yet this too can sometimes come in conflict with what some consider equitable or fair. Is there something else we haven’t considered that could resolve the tension between the two?

Greene (1999) suggests that there may be a framework where “general relativity and quantum mechanics *require one another* for the theory to make sense” (p. 4) but that it will “require that we drastically change our understanding of space, time, and matter” (p. 5). It is with this in mind that I turn to the literature, to find an opening that might allow us to explore the idea of inclusive classrooms in a way that allows us to see them in an entirely new light.

General Relativity: A Theory

*It's a radio that sees
An ancient kiss coming at me
Moving the darkness
I'm short and then I'm tall
I can feel that gravity
Slowly slip away from me
Untethered will I finally meet
The maker of it all?*

"As we have seen, Einstein showed that space and time respond to the presence of mass and energy. This distortion of spacetime affects the motion of other cosmic bodies moving in the vicinity of the resulting warps. In turn, the precise way in which these bodies move, by virtue of their own mass and energy has further effect on the warping of spacetime, which further affects the motion of the bodies, and on and on the interconnected cosmic dance goes. (Greene, 1999, p. 81).

In a thought experiment, I play with a metaphor to understand the psychic dance that goes on in each of the students in an inclusive classroom. I start by imagining that they are each their own universe and that nature and nurture are interwoven in the way that Einstein brought space and time together in his theory of relativity. While there is a general agreement in the field of psychology that both nature and nurture impact development, the degrees to which this impact occurs is often a source of debate. I choose to resolve this in my thought experiment as follows: If gravity is the warping of space and time (Greene, 1999, p. 67), then perhaps experience is the mass that warps the fabric of nature/nurture resulting in learning. Social constructivism puts experience at the heart of learning with Vygotsky, observing that "development and learning are interrelated from the very first day of life" (1978/1997, p. 32). The earth moves around the sun the way it does because the mass of the sun warps spacetime, creating a path of least resistance and thereby capturing planets in its orbit. In a similar way, does a child move from experience to experience, finding their way through an ever-expanding universe, each one shaping their path?

While size tends to be an indication of mass, and Einstein proved through the theory of special relativity that mass and energy are inextricably linked, we often assume that the bigger the experience the bigger impact it has and the sun at the centre of our galaxy proves us right on this point. Dewey (1938/97) noted that "the belief that all genuine education comes about

through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (p. 25), hinting that perhaps there is more to the nature of the experience than meets the eye.

Interestingly enough, in the dark reaches of the universe, there are celestial bodies whose existence was doubted given the sheer scale of their mass. “To make a black hole of the earth, we would have to crush it into a sphere whose radius is less than half an inch” (Greene, 1999, p. 80). What, in the landscape of my own metaphor, could we ascribe to the formation of a black hole, something so dense, that even light struggles to escape? I have only to reflect on a few supernova events I have had the opportunity to observe/experience to come up with my own theory. Could emotion add density to the experience, impacting gravity/learning, with the power to direct individual actions through the path of least resistance, which is created by the way it warps the nature/nurture fabric of an individuals’ universe? If that is the case, then understanding both the source and the impact of emotion on experiences might offer us insight into the relationship between general relativity and quantum mechanics in our learning spaces.

Spacetime Meets Nature Nurture: Theoretical Underpinnings

No one leaves his or her world without having been transfixed by its roots, or with a vacuum for a soul. We carry with us the memory of many fabrics, a self-soaked in our history, our culture; a memory sometimes scattered, sometimes sharp and clear, of the streets of our childhood, of our adolescence; the reminiscence of something distant that suddenly stands out before us, in us, a shy gesture, an open hand, a smile lost in a time of misunderstanding, a sentence, a simple sentence possibly now forgotten by the one who said it. (Freire, 1992, p. 23)

In his book, *Einstein’s Monsters: The Life and Times of Black Holes*, Impey (2019) shares the process of spectrography that captured the first record of gravitational waves “due to a

binary black hole cataclysm somewhere in the universe” (p. 207). To think that an event, more than a billion light years away/ago could actually cause me to “get a tiny bit taller and thinner for an instant, then a tiny bit shorter and fatter” (p. 207) is not only fuel for the imagination, but physical evidence of not only the interconnected universe that we live in, but the vast and timeless nature of it. The histories that accompany our students and ourselves into classrooms striving for inclusion are cluttered with varying degrees of cataclysmic events, some in the distant and others in the not so distant past. To imagine that the gravitational/emotional waves emanating from these events do not distort ourselves and our perceptions of each other would be misguided at best. Critical theory operates similarly to spectography by illuminating the degree to which education is “one of the major sites in which different groups with distinct political, economic, and cultural visions attempt to define what the socially legitimate means and ends of a society are to be” (Apple, 1998, p. 17). But in the same way that spectography measures both the particle and wave aspect of light against each other, feminist theory adds dimension to critical theory through bringing the “soft touch” (Ahmed, 2015) of emotion into these contested spaces and acknowledges the way in which “they involve a stance on the world, or way of apprehending the world” (p. 7). That we believe we can separate ourselves from our emotions would be akin to seeing light as a particle *or* a wave. In physics, it is through understanding dualities that we can begin to see how “each theory can describe and explain certain properties, and neither theory can be said to be better or more real than the other” (Hawking, 2010, p. 58).

Dabrowski’s (1972) TPD enables us to envision the particles and the waves that operate at a quantum level in our classrooms. The ways in which a word, idea, expectation, boundary, sound, touch, etc. may interact differently with each student based on their level of response to stimulus in one or several realms: intellectual, imaginal, psychomotor, sensual, and

emotional. A disproportionate response to stimulus, which may not always be obvious or disruptive, would be what Dabrowski referred to as overexcitability. Of these, he believed that the “emotional (affective), imaginal, and intellectual overexcitability are the richer forms” (p. 7) and appearing together signaled the potential for development and creativity. However, often the disproportionate response to stimulus is pathologized and not seen as the developmental potential Dabrowski believed it to be. He observed that emotional overexcitability can manifest itself through depression and various levels of anxiety, imaginal overexcitabilities as a deficiency of reality and both of these excitabilities could intrude into the intellectual realm, meaning that “intellectual processes thus become more complex and enriched” (p. 79). Without the TPD lens, our ability to see what may lie beneath the surface of these responses may become obscured by a rigid expectation of what an appropriate response to stimulus might be.

It is our emotions that are disintegrative forces as “conflicts of value entail the existence of feelings corresponding to higher and lower values” and “the process of developing or activating these different emotional levels is called *hierarchization*” (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 39).

When the processes of hierarchization move from the phase of spontaneous conflicts and unprogrammed searches for solutions to a phase of greater role of consciousness and organization, then the psychoneurotic processes reach a different level of expression. This level of development is reached only when the autonomous components of the developmental potential are very strong, and that means a high level of self-awareness and self-determination. (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 80).

The difficulty in establishing an inclusive space is the assumption that values can be shared or perhaps more specifically imposed, and that students have an understanding of what it

is that they value. In using general relativity and our nature/nurture continuum to gain insight into the inner universe, could a lack of self-awareness mean that much of it may be uncharted even though experience may have already created something akin to celestial bodies, each with their own gravitational pull based on the density of emotion around the value associated with it? We know this inner universe exists when we observe interactions between those in our classrooms, but beyond that, all we can do is make inferences based on our own experiences, which may be as different as one galaxy to the next.

Everything we learn about the universe involves telescopes gathering radiation. It's very easy to forget that we rely on indirect information. The universe is full of matter: dust grains, gas clouds, moons, planets, stars, and galaxies. We don't see this matter directly; we infer its properties by the way it interacts with electromagnetic radiation. (Impey, 2019, p. 184)

In classes striving for inclusion, there is a tremendous amount of interaction happening within what Vygotsky (1987) described as the zone of proximal development; a place where potential development is “determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 220) making it “both an aid to defining children's understanding, and a means of developing them” (Barrs, 2017, p. 356). Dabrowski (1967) emphasized that this space is value-laden, and unless it is mediated through the emphasis on self-selected values, the trajectory of human development “is tied to a set of relative values serving a particular epoch in time, and not necessarily humanity” (p. 6). This is reflected in Greene's (1999) observation that “not only are space and time influenced by one's state of motion, but they can warp and curve in response to the presence of matter or energy” (p. 6).

Within the ZPD, we can begin to understand the social influence of learning and the degree to which this can impact children who are “construct[ing] their unique developmental paths to higher psychological processes” (p. 347). While this may support them on a functional level with the development of social and cultural tools, a TPD-oriented lens helps us understand what might be causing an emotional response to that same environment. A TPD lens challenges us to view these emotional responses as a signal of another kind of development, one that is not focused strictly on its acquisition of cultural tools, but autonomous in its expressions of an ideal self, separate from the enculturation Vygotsky believed to be at the heart of cognitive development (Doolittle, 1999). Development driven by an understanding of the role of emotions reorients the teacher in the zone. It begins with creating space where the student can “put his experiences in order, to somehow synthesize them, and eventually adjust to the future difficulties of life” (Dabrowski, 1973, p. 72). In this way we can perhaps come to a new understanding of inclusion that operates with a broader expanse of possibilities with respect to what is learned and valued.

Einstein wove gravity into the basic fabric of the universe. Rather than being imposed as an additional structure, gravity becomes part and parcel of the universe at its most fundamental level. Breathing life onto space and time by allowing them to curve, warp, and ripple results in what we commonly refer to as gravity. (Greene, 1999, p. 76)

*Never sure which one is home
Where my feet land or my head roams
Or whether being lost
Is worse than being found
Hold me,
Just hold me,
Hold me,*

*All night long
Oh hold me,
Just hold me,
Hold me,
All night long...*

In Search of Gravitational Pull Within the Literature

If extra dimensions exist, gravity in our universe may flow into other dimensions. That would explain why gravity is such a weak force. (Impey, 2019, p. 150)

The Lure of Dabrowski

Over the years I have attended and presented at three separate Dabrowski Congresses, Canmore 2014, Calgary 2106 and Chicago 2018, whose mandates are essentially to continue sharing the TPD while inviting participants to share their own applications and extensions of the theory. Most have found the theory to resonate with them in a very personal way and share personal accounts of the reverberations of the theory with a significant number of the participants presenting come from the gifted education community. A few have explored the connection to moral education (Hague, 1976), spirituality and consciousness (Harper & Clifford, 2017) empathy (Harper & Clifford, 2019) as well as chaos theory (Laycraft, 2009). Many (Bouchard, 2004; Bouchet, 2001; Chang, & Kuo, 2013; Jackson, & Moyle, 2009; Miller, & Others, 1994; Piechowski, & Colangelo, 1984; Piechowski, & Miller, 1995; Silverman, 2016; Strohm, 2017) have sought to expand and operationalize the reach of the theory through exploring overexcitability as a potential means of identifying, understanding and supporting gifted students. While this has been the source of some controversy with respect to the direction this may have taken the theory (Mendaglio, 2012; Mendaglio, & Tillier, 2006; Tillier, 2009) and others challenging whether the overexcitabilities wouldn't be better explained through theories with more robust empirical support like the five factor model of personality (Vuyk, Kerr, &

Krieshok, 2016), Dabrowski himself did find that “the nervous and psychoneurotic individual is present in an overwhelming percentage of highly gifted children and youths, artists, writers, etc.” and that “this tendency to reach beyond the statistical norm and mediocre development presents the privilege and drama of psychoneurotic people” (Dabrowski, n.d., p. 49). As someone for whom the theory resonates personally as well as providing a critical lens in how I view expressions of emotion, my focus has never been on the relevance of the theory to giftedness, despite working extensively with gifted students. Many of the students who are referred to me who may not meet the criteria for a gifted code, have been referred because of the appearance of overexcitabilities and difficulties with fitting in. In my observations, as classrooms striving for inclusion endeavour to find ways to accommodate, teachers are often left with extensive behaviour plans and teaching strategies that can be cumbersome and awkward, leaving them to question the effectiveness of inclusion.

A Current Understanding of Inclusion

In conducting a literature review I sought out research that highlighted some of the difficulties that were being experienced around the practice of inclusion as well as research that explored the application of TPD in educational settings. Research indicates that inclusion is a struggle on many fronts—inside classrooms, among teachers, within schools, in political arenas, and even within the field of inclusive education itself. Florian (2008) describes a “confusion in the literature about the meanings of inclusive education and many of these meanings are themselves contested”, adding that “teachers are free to think differently about the nature of the problem of ‘learning difficulties’ and the responses they might take” (p. 206). The language of inclusion has changed so that “schools are responsible for examining environmental factors such as regular classroom dynamics rather than focusing merely on the deficits of individual students”

(Erten & Savage 2012, p. 222). In addressing this, Erten and Savage urge researchers to “look beyond [a] physical definition of inclusion” and to remember we cannot assume that inclusion practices are the same for all students requiring support and that this “variation between settings and a lack of control bring several limitations to the inclusive education research agenda” (p. 224). “Teachers’ practice of inclusion is complex and entails a number of dilemmas which the teachers must handle” means that lack of clarification and understanding of what it is we aim to do in inclusive education can result in “teachers [being] caught in contradictory aims leading to frustrations and unproductive choices” (Molbaek, 2018, pp. 1057-1058).

In classrooms, Keith (2010) writes that inclusion could be considered “some variant of cordial relations; a pedagogy that favours communities in which diversity is valued and celebrated without considering the contentious and difficult” (p. 540). Samuels (2018) adds that teachers often have “a narrow understanding of cultures and assets of [the] students and the communities they serve, [which] also results in a potential disconnect and decreased likelihood of embracing this framework” (p. 26). This can be exacerbated by practices that seek to “make students responsible for their behavior so that all teachers can teach - no matter how badly - ‘no excuses’ discipline effectively condones poor quality teaching and even seeks to make students responsible for enduring it” (Graham, 2018, p. 1253). Systemically, “even in schools that wanted to be more inclusive, audit, and special education discourse were set at work in a way that seemingly did make it difficult for teachers to enact inclusive pedagogies” (Schlessinger, 2017, p. 279).

In Alberta, the way in which gay-straight alliances operate in schools was a political flashpoint in the last election (Bennett, 2018), demonstrating how some of our tentative first steps toward broad inclusion could still be undone. But perhaps what is most problematic is that

by definition “all inclusion implies exclusion” (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018, p. 807), and as we scramble to be inclusive, we fail to address the psychological dimension and the degree to which inclusion extends beyond the classroom. Whether through practice or definition, research into inclusive education is rich with opportunity as we strive not only to be inclusive but also to determine the nuances of what that might mean.

What is being excluded in the discourse surrounding inclusion? Burke (2017), when reflecting upon what is required for a “pedagogy of difference,” suggests we need “pedagogical practice in which participants in an act of trust become intimate with their emotions” that addresses the degree to which “shame is deeply connected to those practices that operate to recover the hegemony of rationality and the exclusion of emotion, care and empathy” (pp. 141-142). This echoes Barnett (2011) who claims that “we must address the emotion that holds us back from true dialogue and allow productive conflict” (p. 674). Urquhart (2009) writes that while “many in the teaching profession are turning towards ways of making the emotional dimension an explicit part of the curriculum,” we must take care in that “formal teaching to ensure emotional literacy risk[s] reproducing the customary barriers to inclusion, including a deficit model” (p. 74) that would ultimately work towards emotional regulation over understanding emotional reactions. To support this, Vanderkinderen, Roets, Van Keer, and Roose (2017) urge that “professionals reflexively engage with the unavoidable ambivalence and uncertain contradictory processes in which the perspectives and concerns of young people are taken seriously” (p. 16).

The call for “new directions for psychology that will be particularly relevant to educational inclusion” (Kershner, 2016, p. 133) opens space for Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration (TPD), which is “an emotion-centered, non-ontogenetic, five-level theory of

personality development where the experience of all emotions is essential for the process of growth” (Harper, Cornish, Smith, & Merrotsky, 2017, p. 37). While the gifted community has been aware of Dabrowski’s work, particularly the overexcitabilities, “there is further scope for investigating the place of the full theory within the gifted education literature” (Harper et al., 2017, p. 38). Winkler and Voight (2016) also identify a need for further research to “provide some theoretical clarity to the relationship between TPD and gifted individuals” (p. 253) while Ackerman (2009) suggests that an understanding of the theory might facilitate accurate diagnosis and appropriate intervention for gifted children, helping them to “make sense of [their] inner experience and feelings of being different” (pp. 92-92). It is Prior (2011) who offers an approach for research when she suggests that “the gap between what we say and what we actually provide in schools needs to be addressed by further first-hand evidence including student voice” (p. 125). This approach is not only apparent in the gifted literature. Florian and Beaton (2017) found that when a genuine belief in their competence was communicated to students through word and deed, the choice to “engage and participate in activities that are genuine and meaningful to them as learners” resulted giving what they described as “true meaning to the concept of inclusion” (p. 883).

The Weakest Force?

*When time refuses to define us
And distance fails to confine us
That what is left to remind us
Of the difference that we make?*

*Hold me,
Just hold me,
Hold me,
All night long*

*Oh hold me,
Just hold me,
Hold me,
All night long...*

According to special relativity, no longer can space and time be thought of as universal concepts set in stone, experienced identically by everyone. Rather, space and time emerged from Einstein's reworking as malleable constructs whose form and appearance depend on one's state of motion. (Greene, 1999, p. 5).

In exploring the etymology of the word emotion, Ahmed (2015) draws us to consider "emotions as how we are moved, as well as the implied relationship between movement and attachment, being moved *by* as a connection *to*" (p. 209). If emotion as Dabrowski suggests, drives development, or *how we move in this world*, then we need to pay closer attention, especially if "the means around which emotions flow or are blocked take us back to fundamental social and political questions about how spaces are organized" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 225). Is the idea of inclusion then in danger of becoming a question of whose happiness is prioritized if we fail to recognize the importance of emotional expressions that have been pathologized and/or blocked? As Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) share "a focus on the complexities of inclusion is not only relevant as a prerequisite for managing inclusion of all children, but also as a way of preparing the children for participation in society" (p. 810). Gaining understanding into how and why we *move* and are *moved* by the spaces we find ourselves in has broad social, political, economic, and environmental implications. Perhaps gravity is not the weakest force after all, but distributed in various proportions throughout our universe, ultimately giving it form.

*I can see a million stars
As tiny photons pierce the dark
Sent out from a beacon*

*A billion light years away
Riding on this wobbly rock
A tiny speck on a blue dot
A quantum leap and long shot
To know what is and what is not...*

Chapter 3: Navigating Black Holes

Over the past 100 years, black holes have evolved from a monstrous idea, one that violates common sense, to a proving ground for the most cherished theories in physics. Black holes are like a gift from the universe. They have heft, but the contents of the box are hidden and enigmatic. Yet even the wrapping is fascinating to study. (Impey, 2019, p. 29)

As the thought experiment continues, and black holes form where intense emotion has added density to experience, contemplating how to explore these spaces in ways that honour both the emotion and the experience provides a unique challenge. Ahmed (2015) points out that “feeling is shaped by the contact with the memory, and also involves an orientation towards what is remembered” (p. 7). As such, the hidden and enigmatic properties of black holes may carry with them emotional triggers resulting from “the attribution of meaning through experience” (p. 23), making these reactions incredibly complex. Could it be that our fear of the unexpected ways in which emotions manifest themselves in behaviour keeps us from understanding the gifts they have to offer? If we move forward with that premise, we need to take care in how we proceed.

A New Song Emerges: An Introduction to Methodology

...as inquirers we meet ourselves in the **past, the present, and the future**. What we mean by this is that we tell remembered stories of ourselves from earlier times as well as more current stories. All of these stories offer possible plotlines for our futures. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63)

The Past: From Interpretation to Transformation

When I completed my master’s degree nearly 20 years ago, I was forced to defend my choice of not only engaging in qualitative research, but also utilizing songwriting as a way of

knowing while employing a hermeneutic approach to interpreting my findings. That I love words and metaphors can be no secret, and in *Negotiating the Distance Between the Formal Curriculum and the Pedagogical Relationship* (Picard, 2002), they offered me a place to explore and come to an understanding of who I wanted to be in the classroom and the world. Over the ensuing years, I learned what a challenge it can be to walk your talk in an evolving world that demands you continue to challenge your assumptions as new narratives emerge from those who deserve our attention. I wanted to find a methodology that would enable me to learn how to dance with others at a time and place where walking the talk challenges us to rethink our steps. In investigating participatory action research I found “an egalitarian, collective problem-solving activity rooted in interpersonally sensitive and mutually supportive dialogue” (Bradbury, Mirvis, Neilsen, & Pasmore, 2008, p. 85). Sensitive to Indigenous narratives that have found their way into our classroom striving for inclusion through the efforts of Truth and Reconciliation, I wanted to be an ally in how I conducted research even though my research does not specifically address Indigenous issues. Kovach (2005) writes that “the greatest ally of Indigenous research will be those non-Indigenous “methodologies from the margins: that do not hide but embrace the political nature of research” (p. 33). It has, therefore, been important that my research reflect aspects of an Indigenous research paradigm requiring me to be “guided by a relational accountability that promotes respectful representation, reciprocity” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 40) coupled with an understanding that “knowledge is built through practice as it unfolds in the practice of the people and the researchers” (p. 39). It was this that led me to complete research with those with whom I had already had a relationship. While I will focus on the impact of depathologizing emotional expression to see its value in personality development, there are many aspects of

spaces striving for inclusion that could benefit from an appreciative gaze. Finding strengths in narratives that have been silenced may provide us with what we need to face an uncertain future.

*I was just about to take our love for granted
 When the winds shifted and the sun slipped behind the clouds
 I didn't even see the storm coming,
 Just a crash of thunder screaming "Who's gonna love you now?"
 It's not enough to say we're gonna ride this one out
 We can't just hunker down and hope that the sun will come out*

*'Cause the temperatures rising
 And ice caps are sliding
 Into seas that are dying
 And we think we're still in control
 Measured reactions
 To minor infractions
 In the age of abstraction
 And someone thinks that they were the first one to uncover a black hole.*

The Present: The Need to Interrogate Inclusion

Circulating, all over the world in April of 2019, was the first picture of a black hole compiled through a series of images from telescopes at various points around the planet that were trained at one particular focal point far off in space. It provided a brief reprieve from the political storm raging within my province with respect to which party should form the next government. At the centre of this storm, two unlikely issues were sparring off against each other: LGBTQ rights and a carbon tax. Perhaps it is a little unfair and overly reductionist to single out these two issues as being at the epicentre of the maelstrom, but if ever there were an argument for the existence of alternate universes, this would be it: voters worried where a ballot for one or the other might lead. The slightly blurry image from across the universe captures my imagination

as I try to sift through the storylines that have led to this moment in time and at the same time consider the universes that may lie undiscovered right next to my own. It strikes me that this is the heart of inclusion, not the umbrella statements that we might make about welcoming everyone into our inclusive spaces but the recognition that there may be a universe of differences between us that may not only be fundamentally irreconcilable, but even more problematic, unrecognizable:

A quantum origin for the universe may be a sign that we live in a multiverse, where we inhabit one out of a potentially infinite number of space-time bubbles. The universes in the multiverse are distinct space-times, probably unobservable from our space-time, which makes the idea difficult to test. They might all have different laws of physics and even be unrecognizably different from our universe. Do these other universes have the same fundamental forces? Do they contain black holes? Do they contain life forms that can understand their universe? These are some of the imponderable questions at the frontier of cosmology. (Impey, 2019, p. 218)

The Future: The Possibilities of Inquiry

To nudge the conception of our classrooms into the quantum realms and consider what it might mean to manage/create/facilitate inclusivity between universes might seem not only like an exercise in futility but also completely imponderable. An eight-year old's response to the picture of black hole, however, might highlight the gravity of the question(s) I am pursuing through my research, while also igniting a sense of adventure. The amorphous image released by the Event Horizon Telescope collaboration looks like an unimpressive orange donut when juxtapositioned beside the artistic renderings of magnificent black holes that you find when searching through google images. At first, my young astrophysicist is skeptical, not sure which

to accept as real as he has frequently gazed at the latter with a certain level of awe. As I explain to him how they captured the image using several radio telescopes from around the planet to create one large telescope, his eyes begin to shimmer with tears as his vivid imagination takes him to the edge of it, and he fears that it is bigger and closer than it is. “What if we get sucked in?” he worries out loud, his fear of being subsumed by another force is palpable. “It could be the pathway to another universe,” I respond. “What kind of spaceship do you think I would need to travel into it?” He brightens up. “There is such a thing as a multiverse,” he tells me confidently and we go on to discuss whether our ship would need to withstand pressure or friction were we to risk this journey. In that moment, I am amazed by two things. First, the power of story to reorient ourselves to our circumstances and how even the darkest reaches of the universe become a little less frightening when we consider that they may be other than what we may have heard in another narrative, but perhaps, more importantly, how quickly we move toward assessing the resources we already have for making the journey. Invite a child and you are halfway across the galaxy before someone mentions the word imponderable, and by then, it is too late to turn back. It is the energy and inspiration from exchanges such as this one that inspire me to utilize appreciative inquiry as my research method, with special attention to the narrative aspects of the data, to be explored with students, to explore the theory of positive disintegration and how it might influence how we see ourselves and others in spaces striving for inclusivity.

Melodies and Harmonies: Narrative and Appreciative Inquiry

I was just about to take our love for granted

When the winds shifted and the sun slipped behind the clouds...

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write that it is crucial for narrative inquirers “to be able to articulate a relationship between one’s personal interests and sense of significance and larger social concerns expressed in the works and lives of others” (p. 122) stressing the degree to which

“the participants’ and researchers’ narratives of experience situated and lived out on storied landscapes [act] as our theoretical methodological frame” (p. 128). For me, this is impossible to do without the assistance of song as its form and poetic language allows the significance between the personal and larger concerns to be laid bare. With my *Black Holes* song, it is pretty simple. The second that I take my relationships for granted, the entire planet is placed in jeopardy. So knowing this, why on earth would I take my relationships for granted? The response to this is in the chorus. The relationships that sustain me span from the closest, most intimate ones I have within my family and community, to those that exist at a planetary level, like the ocean that is more than a thousand kilometres away. Is it even possible for me to give each of these relationships the attention they deserve? To suggest that each of these relationships might require a black hole worth of energy is not an exaggeration as I can attest to through the time it now takes me to simply delete the deluge of emails that arrive hourly in my inbox imploring me to attend to the issues they represent, each one with the capacity to make me as teary as my eight-year old friend. “Life—as we come to it and it comes to others—is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in narrative unities and discontinuities” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). And so, when I see the student’s tears, uncertain of the degree to which his imagination, enthusiasm, and emotions will inflate the size and location of the black hole, I turn toward it, and him, rather than away, because in this moment, he has offered me a sacred trust.

Black holes, be they real, imaginary, or metaphorical require something from us, whether it’s perspective, boundaries, or preparedness; because... while they might be “metaphors for death and destruction... they also [hold] out hope for transformation and eternal life,

since time freezes at the event horizon and nobody knows what lies inside” (Impey, 2019, p. 23).

The event horizon, where gravity is so strong that time comes to a standstill is not only found in the outer reaches of space. Assuming that memories are experiences frozen in time, I can remember times when my own were the guardians of emotional quagmires that threatened my very existence, inspiring me to do all I could to escape their gravitational pull. If narrative inquiry were my only method of engaging in a question revolving around the role of emotions in our development, I would be hesitant to defy gravity to explore what lies below. Returning to vast reaches of space, however, I learn that there are many black holes scattered not only throughout the universe, but throughout our galaxy, and that they have only come to our attention because of the effect they have on the celestial bodies that emit light, thus earning a moniker of “the invisible dance partner” (Impey, 2019, p. 40). It is the visible dancer who allows us to see the invisible one and the relationship that they have with one another based on the mass or weight of each and so we must focus on that which emits light to understand the gravity and mass of the black hole (p. 42).

Narrative inquiry is the method for describing the dancers, the dance floor, and even the music that are key to understanding how we move about in our relationships. But we do not want to stop there. It’s a little like Jane Taylor (1806) asking in the first verse “Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are?” and before long, we know the words of the first verse, about the star, the diamond in the sky, and verse three becomes lost in time as would the traveler who “could not see which way to go, if you did not twinkle so”. It is appreciative inquiry that will direct our attention to the dance steps themselves to find what enlivens and directs them as we make our way about the dance floor. Appreciative inquiry asserts that what we focus on becomes

our reality, that “reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities” (Reed, 2007, p. 28). Critics of appreciative inquiry wonder about the potential of it as a method to “oppressively prohibit any talk of difficulty or problems” (MacNamee, 2007, p. ix), and if we focus only on what energizes us, are we not denying all talk of problems? This would depend, I suppose, on what you are looking to appreciate. If we want to understand what makes the star twinkle, we must learn to appreciate black holes.

In his book, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, Thomas King (2003) suggests that “we love our binaries and wonders about “other ways of imagining the world, ways that do not depend so much on oppositions as they do on cooperations” (p. 110). Through the TPD, Dabrowski (1964) speaks to “the importance of developmental crises and gives an understanding of the developmental role of, for example, feelings of guilt, of shame, of inferiority or superiority, of the ‘object-subject’ process, of the ‘third factor’ and of so-called psychopathological symptoms” (p. 22). These crises, marked by depression, anxiety, and psychoneurosis are often pathologized and misunderstood for the important role they play in development and often cast into a binary of poor mental health vs good mental health as opposed to dance partner that allows these symptoms to be viewed as potentially contributing to mental health. But don’t these potential black holes pull at the star, steal its energy, and threaten its very existence? Perhaps the problem is that we do not really know what happens inside the black hole. If the Canadian Mental Health Association’s (2019) claim that “by age 40, about 50% of the population will have or have had a mental illness,” then it would seem critical that we gain more understanding. What happens when my wondering draws toward this invisible dancer, the black hole of emotion that I worry about, in an effort to see how it (co)operates in a way that I can potentially appreciate?

As physicists struggled with ways to understand what happened on the surface and within a black hole, Jacob Bekenstein (in Impey, 2019) noted that “nothing observed in nature is immune from the second law of thermodynamics—entropy is always increasing—and black holes should be no exception” (p. 21). So what does this mean? Here is where the physics gets really interesting. Pop the word entropy into a search engine and you will come up with synonyms that include chaos, disorder, and randomness (Merriam Webster, 2019), something I know from experience can cause a great deal of anxiety. But Impey tells us that physicists define entropy as measuring “the number of ways atoms or molecules can be rearranged without changing its overall properties” (p. 21). Disorder and chaos then become an opening for other possibilities. It is this definition of entropy, or in my metaphor, these multiple realities, when brought to a black hole, create a paradoxical thermodynamic that eventually, would cause the black hole to eventually evaporate. While emotional black holes may initially fill us with anxiety, reorganizing them in a new and meaningful way, may impact their gravitational pull and the degree to which it impacts our other experiences and interactions. What happens, if over space and time, we refuse to acknowledge or learn from the various movements/influence of our invisible partner? If, as Dabrowski (1964) theorizes, “the disintegration process, through loosening and even fragmenting the internal psychic environment, through conflicts within the internal and with the external environment, is the ground for birth and development of a higher psychic structure” (p. 5), we may have a lot to lose. . . in all of our relationships. An appreciative gaze on the role that these emotions play in our lives might not only help us to see ourselves differently but might also help cast that same appreciative gaze on others who may be perceived as struggling.

With the right trajectory, an object can enter the ergosphere and leave with more energy than it had on the way in. The black hole will spin very slightly slower as a result.

(Impey, 2019, p. 241)

*Restless dreams in the middle of the night
 Fueled by a longing for something to end this season of doubt
 I didn't even feel the despair coming
 Just a whisper of shame asking "Who's gonna love you now?"
 It's not enough to buy a ticket on the next ride out
 You can't quench the thirst that comes from a manufactured drought.*

*'Cause the temperatures are rising
 And ice caps are sliding
 Into seas that are dying
 And we think we're still in control
 Knee jerk reactions
 To major infractions
 In the age of distractions
 And someone thinks that they were the first one to uncover a black hole*

Spaceships and Flight Plans: Research Design

At the centre of our galaxy, “the existence of a supermassive black hole has been proven beyond any reasonable doubt” (Impey, 2019, p. 95). Scientists observing what earlier appeared to be nothing more than an enormous cloud of dust around it over a period of sixteen years were able to observe not only the impact it had on the orbits of stars, but also how it tore apart stars and gas clouds that were pulled into its gravitational pull (p. 95). As a narrative inquirer, this discovery resonates with me as I am not only curious about the individual stories that will be uncovered through the process of research, but the way that they might be connected and influenced by a “grander” narrative, one that critical theorists seek to illuminate, be they

grounded in colonialism, scientific method, meritocracy, or otherwise. While the knowledge that there is a black hole at the centre of our galaxy does not free us from its gravitational pull, perhaps being aware of its force allows us to be more thoughtful in how we navigate within our own orbits?

A rotating black hole has two photon spheres and drags space with it as it spins. The inner photon sphere moves in the direction of rotation and the outer photo sphere moves against the rotation. Think of a swimmer trying to escape the maelstrom. They hold their ground by swimming against the current: if they swim with the current, they are pulled closer to their doom. (Impey, 2019, p. 167)

If you have ever tried to swim against the current, you will know how exhausting it can be. What are the underlying currents in our spaces striving for inclusion? Expectations around achievement. Expectations around behaviour. Expectations around relationships. Expectations around grit. Going with the current feels effortless and, if you trust the goals of the institution, might assume it will deliver you to the next threshold. But when the chorus is reprised, it imposes the question whether expectations themselves are not properties (not the beginnings) of yet another black hole? But could that in itself be responsive to another metanarrative, one in which stories have beginnings, middles, and endings that occur within an accessible timescale?

As evidenced in the collaboration between optical and radio astronomers in mapping the universe, if we were to rely on a single method for exploring the universe, much of what we know would still be invisible to us. In the same way that a radio telescope enhances what we are capable of seeing in the vast expanse of space, the pairing of narrative and appreciative inquiry has the potential to make visible dimensions that may not have existed. And once they become visible, through the appreciative process and its 4D cycle of inquiry (discovery, dreaming,

design, and destiny), we discover the opportunity to become theoretical physicists by developing our own provocative propositions about how things could be within the inclusive space in which we find ourselves.

Vessel Specifications: The Phases of Appreciative Inquiry

Rooted in social constructionism, appreciative inquiry (AI) presumes a connection between language, knowledge and action resulting in inquiry that centers around what is good in order to build on strengths as opposed to entering potentially degenerative spirals that may lead to exaggerated focus on problems (Grant & Humphries, 2006, p. 403). AI embraces the positive disintegration paradox in seeking to find what might be positive about so called negative emotions. If “disintegration is positive when it enriches life, enlarges the horizon, and brings forth creativity” (Dabrowski, 1964, p. 10) then a methodology that works to “affirm the symbolic capacities of imagination and mind as well as the social capacity for conscious choice and cultural evolution” (Cooperider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 3) is necessary. In superimposing AI over narrative inquiry, am I forwarding an agenda with respect to how the TPD is viewed and understood? Reflexivity and the critical theory lens will be important in understanding how power can be exerted through the language that we use, especially if we have a limited understanding of what it means to be appreciative (Grant & Humphries, 2006, p. 407). Even within critical theory, finding hope in our reality is important, as is dreaming about what could be (Freire, 2007, pp. 3-4). The discovery and dream phases of AI and the questions that guide them, offer me a new and unique approach in disrupting the way that we think about inclusion through exploring stories that highlight the positive aspects of both the experience and the emotions associated with that experience (Clouder & King, 2015, p. 2). These discoveries and dreams set the participants up to design their individual and collective destiny, the final two

phases in a process and inquiry method that Clouder and King suggest had no references in educational research prior to 1996 (p. 6).

The 4D cycle of AI creates a zone of proximal development where new possibilities emerge from conversations that turn our attention to the individual and collective strengths (Cooperrider, 2018, p. 10) that exist within our spaces striving for inclusion. It is where the constructivist, dialectic nature of our development as described by Vygotsky (Bruner, 1987), can access an independent hierarchy of values outlined by Dabrowski simply by casting an appreciative gaze on the disintegrative nature of development. From the introduction of TPD and role of emotions at the discovery phase, to the imagining of a personality ideal at the dream phase, each new phase aims to empower participants to incorporate the poetic principle of AI accessing their own stories for learning and inspiration (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003, p. 8). Here, critical theory meets constructivism as the historical forces and language that have shaped our thoughts become the places where we can find tools and language for imagining and shaping how things could be (Bruner, 1987, p.2) through the creation of aspiration statements. In invoking aspects of narrative inquiry in the discovery and dream phases, we might find that the new understanding of our own story has the power to shape the spaces that we find ourselves in (Clandinin, 2013 p. 34).

It is at the design phase where the AI process and the creation of provocative proposition may begin to reflect Dabrowski's (n.d., pp. 51-52) view of authentic education as the positive elements of disintegration, including emotions, are reconsidered and reoriented within our spaces striving for inclusion. All the data collected through recorded discussions/interviews, whiteboard captures, journals, exit slips, illustrations will be reviewed, organized and celebrated as participants consider and decide what action could evolve from what they discovered in the first

two phases. Following this is the destiny phase where, as Vygotsky suggested, we not so much overcome history as convert it to an asset (Bruner, 1987, p. 2) as both groups move forward individually and collectively, with new resources with which to re-engage when the need arises again. Each successive phase in the 4D cycle addresses the sub questions I framed initially, with the idea that inquiry and change are inseparable (Cooperrider et al, 2008, p. 8). I am hopeful that this work will not only add to a current body of research and help shape practice in our district, but also make a difference in the lives of my participants.

Flight Plan for This Appreciative Inquiry

The plan and timeline for the research, an overview of activities, including the gathering of informed consent, are outlined below. The final face-to-face meeting for member checking and celebration was revised and hardcopies of the drafts were delivered to the schools the students attended with a return envelope enabling them to get their responses back to me. The celebratory feast was postponed until later in the spring, but this was complicated by the COVID-19 restrictions.

Two meetings were scheduled. All meetings were characterized by opening and closing activities that centred around the The Virtues Project™ (Kavelin-Popov, Popov, & Kavelin, 1997) for setting boundaries at the beginning of the day and honouring the spirit at the end. Setting boundaries included identifying the virtues that I believed we would support us in creating a safe space for our activities and conversations. Honouring the spirit included acknowledging the virtues that we saw in practice during the meeting/day that enhanced our experience over the course of the day.

Maiden Voyage: Two-Hour Afternoon Meeting (1:00-3:00pm)

*There were a number of student co-researchers who were unable to attend the first meeting so I met with two smaller groups in order to include all those who were interested in participating. I met with each of the teacher co-researchers separately due to schedule difficulties. The first meeting covered how the inquiry has been set up using the appreciative inquiry framework and various methods of data collection as a means of addressing their initial questions. In addition to that, we reviewed informed consent and made sure they understood their ability to withdraw at any time as well as the resources available to them should their involvement trigger any responses that required support. We also used this time to establish timelines for the research. Appreciative inquiry often takes place in summits that last for several days, in this case two and a half, we had to decide together whether to do them all together or disperse them over the course of several weeks so individuals had time to sit with and reflect on aspects of the inquiry.

Initial Flight: Day One of the Appreciative Inquiry Summit (8:30am -3:00pm)

The second meeting was divided into two parts. In the morning, participants were given journals/notebooks to keep track of information they found to be relevant. The TPD was shared through handouts, diagrams, a puppet show, slides, and videos. Teaching material was drawn from original texts as well as the online archive found at <http://www.positivedisintegration.com/>. Participants had the opportunity to pose questions and discuss various aspects of the theory, and exit slips were used to gather final reflections. The morning included short breaks for stretching and refreshments and concluded with an hour-long lunch break.

In the afternoon, we began with the first phase of the 4D cycle by reviewing the suggested interview questions to see if there were any additions the group would like to add to

the list in the spirit of appreciative inquiry. Participants had various avenues for completing the questions including one-on-one with another participant, through reflective journaling or drawing on their own, recording their responses, scheduling time with the facilitator, in a small focus group with the facilitator, or other possibilities that emerged. Participants completed the interview summary prior to wrapping up the day. These questions were used to guide the discovery report that would be shared at the Dream Phase.

Connecting Flight: Day Two of the Appreciative Inquiry Summit (8:30am -3:00pm)

This phase began with an energizing activity followed by revisiting what was learned about the theory on the first day. This was followed by a choice between two focal questions for participant response depending on how TPD resonated with them. These responses were captured in journal entries/reflections allowing them to take whatever form they chose. We then moved on to the foundational question at which point the Discovery Report was shared with the group including, but not limited to, quotes, compelling stories, life-giving moments, and golden innovations. The group then looked for emergent themes and creative edges that were collected through sticky notes/large pieces of paper/whiteboard. This phase concluded with the creation of aspiration statement(s) that were shared individually and/or collectively through exit slips, journal reflections, illustrations, sticky notes, whiteboard captures.

After taking the appropriate breaks, we moved on to part one of the destiny phase that included an introduction to Cooperrider's (2008) design elements and consideration of the structure required to make our dream, of what could be, a reality. In addition, we worked to identify key relationships that contributed to the positive core that we were building upon. This process included a review of the key ingredients in supporting emotional growth that was developed in the Discovery Report as well as a review of themes and creative edges that emerged

through the dream phase. I then referred to the book *Imagine A Day* (Thomson & Gonsalves, 2005) after which the participants began the process of creating provocative propositions that were both philosophical and carried what they considered to be the possibility of practical applications.

Upon completion of part one of the destiny phase and after appropriate breaks, we moved on to part 2 of the destiny phase where participants considered the ways that we could individually, and collectively, share and grow from the work that we had done. A review of AI competencies—affirmative, expansive, generative, and collaborative—were shared as consideration of how to share our work as well as creating possibilities that would continue to evolve in a world of change. Data was collected through exit slips, journal reflections, illustrations, sticky notes, whiteboard captures.

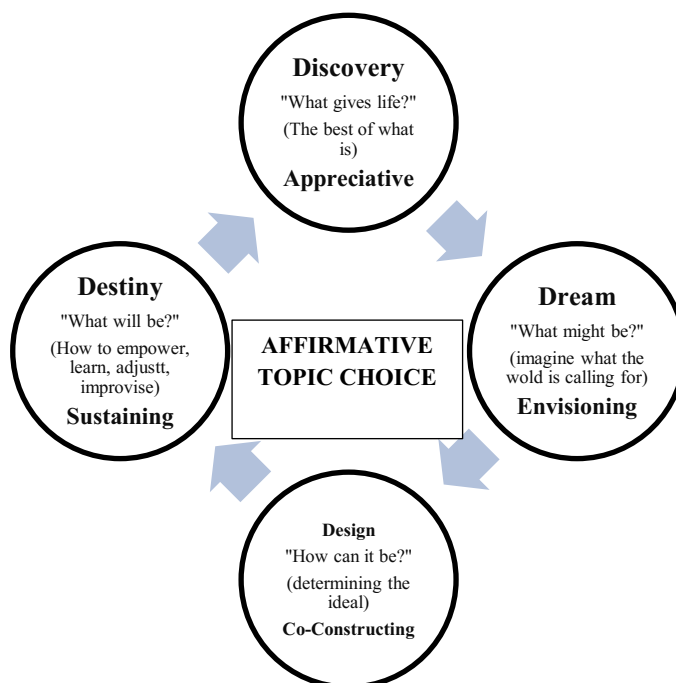
In the Figure 1, the four phases of the appreciative inquiry cycle are utilized to re-envision inclusive spaces through the lens of the TPD demonstrating how each phase addresses one of the sub questions of the research. In the discovery phase the interview questions address the first sub question of “How might the depathologizing of emotional expressions influence how students think and feel about themselves is explored?” The second sub question of “How might an understanding of disintegration as a process of considering and creating a hierarchy of values, offer them insight into their relationships with others?” is addressed in the dream phase. The third sub question “What features of and/or practices within inclusive spaces support personality development through positive disintegration?” is addressed in the design phase.

Figure 1

4D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry

Discovery Phase: Use of appreciative interview questions to discover the “best of what is”. Interview summaries will be completed to find compelling quotes, stories, insights.

Destiny Phase: Characterized by ongoing emergent practice that is a result of participation in the earlier phases and, therefore, not guided by procedures. Reflections about the process and its future applications with regard to TPD and inclusion gathered at this time.



Dream Phase: Focal questions are used to imagine future selves and learning spaces to envision how an appreciate understanding of their emotional experiences and expressions could shape who they are becoming as well as the learning spaces they are in.

Design Phase: Exploration of themes and creation of provocative propositions that could be shared with parents, teachers, learning leaders, and other students about the role of emotions in individual development and ways individuals and learning spaces could be used to support those who may be struggling toward who they wish to be.

“Appreciative Inquiry 4D Cycle” adapted from Cooperider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008, p. 34)

Star Maps: The Site of Inquiry

In our school district, the goal is that every student, regardless of the classroom in which they find themselves, has access to quality instruction and targeted supports. The gifted program provides opportunities for students to work together in a “pull-in” setting nine to ten days a year through Grades 4-8 as well as supporting teachers in creating individual program plans (IPPs) or academic action plans (AAPs) depending on specific student needs in the classroom. Although

my time each year with students is short, I get the opportunity to meet with them over the course of five years, sometimes longer if they are identified as needing support earlier or into the high school years. As a community of choice, students have the option of not participating in the pull-in program. Those who do can explore inclusion on two levels: being supported within their regular school environment and being grouped with others who have been identified as sharing a specific learning need, albeit the areas of giftedness that were identified during the screening process may have indicated significant differences in areas of giftedness.

Three programming options are available to them as part of the pull-in program. Most students choose Destination Imagination® (Destination Imagination, 2018) an international creative and collaborative problem-solving experience where teams of two to seven participants learn project management skills as they prepare solutions for STEAM challenges being issued to teams around the globe. Second to this is a combination of math contest and coding retreat where students compete in several math contests as well as learn coding at their own pace using a variety of online platforms. Finally, there is the artists retreat, where participants are invited to work on independently chosen projects that include everything from video editing to novel writing, crocheting to animation, all self-directed with support from a teacher.

In addition to these pull-in options, the three groups are introduced to The Virtues Project™ (Kavelin-Popov, Popov, & Kavelin, 1997), an international initiative that embeds the language and practice of virtues in everyday life as well as through yearly themes which have included a novel study, exploring ways of knowing, and cultivating wisdom. These activities, from the screening process to the time spent in various activities over the course of years have led to a rather unique set of relationships and experiences that have fostered the emergence of the

research questions as expressed by both myself and the students, as well as the relationships necessary to pursue them.

Turning back to the vast expanses of space, it cannot be overlooked that in as much as our gaze outward from earth has been turned toward understanding the forces that govern what happens in the universe, we have also been looking for evidence that we are not alone. We are shaped by those around us pondering the same universe, or those we imagine may still be out there to encounter, and we construct our world of possibilities from what we are at presently able to comprehend until a signal from afar captured by an attentive mind here, pushes us further than we were able to go alone. Whether it is the presence of an architect who has constructed the possibilities that our current form has given us the opportunity to explore, or the presence of other forms of life that have emerged from a unique set of relationships, our curiosity and imagination seem limitless. Turning this curiosity to the communities or universes we inhabit and forces that exist within them, as well as those that make us individually unique, is as timeless as gazing at the stars. Perhaps in the same way that eight ground-based radio telescopes worked together to capture the first visual image of a massive black hole way out in space, a small group of specialized (co)researchers with their own unique lenses, carefully working together, can capture something equally captivating.

Flight Manifest: Participants

Who picked whom for this journey is a little difficult to describe. For a decade, the gifted program in my small rural community of less than 70 000 has been screening students to receive in-class support through an Individual Program Plan (IPP) as well as offering them the opportunity to participate in pull-in programming. Most students are identified at the end of the third grade and continue with programming until the end of Grade 8, although they can be

referred at any grade level should a teacher identify a potential need. So, I suppose you could say that it was a teacher who first selected them as not all students are referred. During the screening process, much attention is given to results of tests such as the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (Nelson, 2016), the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (Wechsler, 2014), or the Stanford Binet (Gale, 2004). On a philosophical level, I might argue that the test, and myself, as test administrator and consultant in establishing the criteria for who would be considered to be gifted, had a role to play in participant selection. When a high school student asked whether she could continue to meet after the official Grade 4-8 programming was complete, a new selection process was put in motion: invitations were issued and a small group of students (s)ected to participate. A few of the students at this meeting expressed an interest in learning more about the nature of giftedness, knowledge, and conducting research, which offered a pathway that honoured both the questions they were asking and the direction I had been going with respect to completing my doctoral research. A new invitation was thus shared, highlighting the research question and what was expected, with the 67 students who had been identified by the program over the years as Gifted, and who would be in Grades 9-12 for the 2019-20 school year within our district. Twenty four students from three high schools accepted the invitation.

The decision to include a teacher group in research had also been discussed in those initial contacts with students, prior to even considering that all of this be part of my doctoral studies. At the time, they had asked why more teachers in the district did not know more about giftedness. I considered whether I should invite all the teachers in the district or just grade three teachers as that is the year most students are referred. I eventually settled on the learning support teachers (LST), whose role it is to support teachers who have students with diverse learning needs in their inclusive classrooms. Their access to a variety of classrooms, involvement with

students who struggle for a variety of reasons, as well as often being the point person in the school for managing gifted referrals made them an ideal choice given their unique position in the school. Since the student group would be coming from grades 9-12, I invited the LSTs who were from the K-8 schools to add a degree of separation in case the groups would elect to meet together at some point in the research. An invitation was issued, highlighting the research questions and what was expected to 18 LST teachers in our district. Two teachers from two different schools accepted the invitation.

Flight Recorder: Ongoing Data Collection and Analysis

From discovery to destiny, the 4D cycle of AI is initiated by a set of co-generated questions that can be responded to individually, in small groups or pairs. Given that the groups for this inquiry were small, two days for each group felt sufficient to complete the process, although there were times when I wished for more, particularly at the end of each day when it felt a little rushed to get the last items on our agenda completed.

Prior to beginning the AI cycle, I met with both groups individually to review how AI works, establish meeting times, and consider how the two groups might work together. As the more vulnerable of my research groups, I gave the student group the option of meeting with the teachers; they elected to meet separately. Both groups also opted to have the summit days occur weeks apart from each other. The student group was reluctant to miss two school days in a row. They also indicated their desire for time to absorb the theory and discovery data prior to moving on to the remaining phases of the inquiry cycle as a result the summit days were scheduled two weeks apart. For the teachers, finding a single day to meet was a challenge, let alone two in a row and in the end, we met several weeks apart as well. Data for both groups was gathered

through a variety of means: written responses, journaling, audio recordings, whiteboard captures, exit slips, illustrations, and the creation of provocative propositions.

The appeal of utilizing AI as a means of exploring how an understanding of TPD impacts how we see ourselves and others in spaces striving for inclusion is the way in which data analysis is embedded in the process. The 4D cycle of AI creates a zone of proximal development where new possibilities emerge from conversations that turn our attention to the individual and collective strengths (Cooperrider, 2018, p. 10) that exist within our spaces striving for inclusion. This is where the constructivist, dialectic nature of our development as described by Vygotsky (Bruner, 1987), can access an independent hierarchy of values outlined by Dabrowski simply by casting an appreciative gaze on the disintegrative nature of development. From the introduction of TPD and role of emotions at the discovery phase, to the imagining of a personality ideal at the dream phase, each new phase empowers participants to incorporate the poetic principle of AI accessing their own stories for learning and inspiration (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003, p. 8). Here, critical theory meets constructivism as the historical forces and language that have shaped our thoughts become the places where we can find tools and language for imagining and shaping how things could be (Bruner, 1987, p. 2) through the creation of aspiration statements. In invoking aspects of narrative inquiry in the discovery and dream phases, we might find that the new understanding of our own story has the power to shape the spaces that we find ourselves in (Clandinin, 2013 p. 34).

It is at the design phase where the AI process and the creation of provocative proposition may begin to reflect Dabrowski's (n.d., pp. 51-52) description of authentic education: where the positive elements of disintegration, including emotions, are reconsidered and reoriented within our spaces striving for inclusion. Data analysis was an individual and collaborative effort as all

the data collected through recorded discussions/interviews, whiteboard captures, journals, exit slips, illustrations were reviewed for key themes and golden nuggets, and then organized and celebrated as co-researchers considered and decided what action could evolve from what they discovered in the first two phases.

This was followed by the destiny phase where, as Vygotsky suggests (in Bruner, 1987), we not so much overcome history as convert it to an asset as both groups moved forward individually and collectively, with new resources they could re-engage if/when the need arises. Each successive phase in the 4D cycle addresses the sub questions, initially framed, with the idea that inquiry and change are inseparable (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 8). Using AI as a tool to navigate not only future problems, but also disintegrative experiences, reflects Dabrowski's notion of the importance of autopsychotherapy in individual development. Who better than ourselves and those close to us to cast an appreciative gaze on the data of our own stories, to discern what form our hierarchy of values should take as we navigate the future we hope to co-create? In this way, data analysis becomes a process of daily reflection.

As an optimist, I imagine an Age of Knowledge, when some learn how to read the information stored holographically on the event horizon, and others venture into spinning black holes to take refuge on the time-like surface, a hall of temporal mirrors where you can travel back and forth to meet your past and future self, but never leave. (Impey, 2019, p. 244)

Vessel Safety Card: Ethical Considerations

There are three dimensions of ethics that need to be addressed in this study beginning with those pertinent to all researchers in Canada. My explorations within Indigenous research methodologies draws me to the address the 4Rs of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and

relationality as ethical imperatives in supporting the ongoing work of truth, reconciliation as well as decolonization within our various institutions (Wilson, 2008). While these dimensions are multifaceted, they will need to be key considerations in research design. Well-designed research also reflects a commitment to following the ethical guidelines established by local, provincial, tribal, and international organizations as well as understanding and carefully adhering to issues of consent, confidentiality, privacy, and safekeeping of data.

The second dimension that is particularly pertinent to this study is vulnerability. One of the groups with whom I plan to work are not only adolescents but have also been identified as gifted which is considered a special needs population, with the further possibility that some of these students may be twice-exceptional. Their assent, ongoing consent, and right to withdraw will be important elements ensuring that they feel both safety and power as we proceed. While they are no longer part of the formal programming aspect of the gifted program, the fact that I have been their teacher in the past could also influence our relationship, though their participation would be voluntary. Ongoing reflective practice and writing on my part will need to play an important role in carefully considering how my role as co-researcher, teacher, and colleague may be influencing the process. There is also a vulnerability in the sharing of stories both with respect to how they are perceived by others and how they may inadvertently implicate those who are not part of the research study including other students, teachers, and particular schools or classrooms. Careful attention must be given to maintaining the safety and confidentiality of those individuals and groups. A third vulnerability is the nature of the inquiry which, while taking an appreciative approach, may trigger emotions and memories that may be difficult for co-researchers. Making the co-researchers aware of the various supports available to them will be important.

A third dimension requiring ethical consideration applies to the methods involved in the gathering, representation, and dissemination of data. Co-researchers must be involved in the process in meaningful and appropriate ways at all points in the process which includes my role in ensuring this happens. This is reflected in the ethical considerations (Clouder & King, 2015) inherent in using AI beginning with my own competencies as an AI facilitator and my ability to keep things positive. I believe my experience as a Virtues Project™ (Kavelin-Popov, Popov, & Kavelin, 1997) facilitator will be an asset as this training focused on learning how to positively frame teachable moments through the language of the virtues as well as outlining a framework for companioning those who, through this research, may be prone to over-disclosure. I will also need to be careful around the potential for raising false hopes about the degree to which this study would impact broader systemic change as is often the goal of AI. In representation, I will need to keep in mind the (mis)representation and (mis)understanding that is often associated with giftedness and how this research could influence or be influenced by that. With careful attention to ethics, it is my hope that this study will seek to imagine and co-author a new story for students in our schools, particularly, but not exclusively those who are identified as gifted, through appreciating the importance of our inner experiences as they play out in the spaces that aspire to be inclusive.

Chapter Four: Exploring the Multiverse

So given the multiverse, the simple answer to “Why are things like they are?” is that they have to be or we wouldn’t be here. (Clegg, 2012, p. 283)

Almost ten years ago, I led my first enrichment class as part of the newly formed gifted program in my school district. At that moment in time, I was reading Bill Bryson’s (2003) book, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. To greet my students, I decided to draw from his initial pages where he congratulates the reader for having ancestors who had not only managed to crawl out of the primordial stew onto land, but managed to avoid untimely death scenarios as varied as getting stuck fast in an ancient bog, providing repast for some carnivorous creature, eventually surviving brutal wars, in addition to being attractive enough to find mates, over millennia, in order to propagate (pp. 3-4). This was, I suppose, my attempt to highlight both the significance of the moment while situating it in a vast series of serendipitous events that found us in a room together: a newly branded Gifted Lead teacher with students newly identified as Gifted.

The vast number of contingencies that led me to being in a room on the first day of a summit, some ten years later, was not lost on me; only this time, I was a newly branded researcher with 24 research co-participants. Some of us shared a ten-year history, while others were known for a short time. Some had spent their entire lives in our community, while others had been born in far off lands and spoke as many as four languages. At four different grade levels, there were academics, artists, athletes, and multi-potentialites of varying age and grade levels, some of whom had a clear vision of their life’s purpose, while others were still exploring. While all had participated in gifted programming, the ways in which they had been identified varied. Many different pathways converging with the gifted program and myself being the common denominator. For some, I was a team manager, not allowed to interfere in their process

of finding a solution to the “Destination Imagination” team challenge. For others, I was the person who opened up space for them to explore math and coding, comfortable with weird math, bringing in experts for advanced math, hopelessly deferring them to one another to solve coding problems. And yet, for others, I was a fellow artist, playing with a variety of mediums and artistic expressions, encouraging them to embrace their creativity.

To consider the impact of the diverse set of relationships I shared with the research participants in this inquiry would be difficult to bring to full transparency despite the fact that “the researcher position is a reflection of membership, alliance, and interest and shapes a number of ways in which the study takes place” (Reed, 2007, p.82), much like the electron.

Once you admit that an electron can be in a superposition of different locations, it follows that a person can be in a superposition of having seen the electron in different locations, and indeed that reality as a whole can be in a superposition, and it becomes natural to treat every term in that superposition as a separate “world”. (Carroll, 2019, p. 40).

Over the course of ten years, I observed and was observed in many different positions by the students who were now participating in the study. That they were coming together to share stories of those journeys and appreciate the factors both within the spaces we had shared, as well as other spaces striving for inclusion that helped them arrive in this moment of time, filled me with gratitude. And so I was careful as I prepared for the day, making sure I had a wide assortment of snacks available, journals for writing or sketching, pens, papers, sticky notes, as well as colourful virtues cards for each of them. As they arrived, they selected journals, drinks, and snacks. I began the day by expressing my gratitude and acknowledging their courage and trust, knowing that soon their differences would become as evident as their similarities as we engaged in the process of learning and discovery. We were all a little nervous and because the

co-participants ranged in age and came from different schools, they were not all known to one another, though some knew each other well.

As an opening energizer I utilized a four-square activity designed to get them moving and learning a bit about one another where they could share little bits of information about themselves simply by moving to a particular spot in the room. We began by dividing the four corners of the room into grade levels allowing them to meet other co-participants in the same grade. To get a better sense of each other, they organized themselves according to different topics like how long they had been in the program and the kind of programming in which they had been involved. I also used this opening time to share a few fond stories and memories of some of the things I remembered from the different groups with whom I had worked over the years. When this activity was complete, everyone found a place at a table, and I reviewed the purpose of the research. And so, our day of research began.

Flight Recorder: 021019AM Exploring the Theory of Positive Disintegration with Students

Identified as Gifted

A theory is a good theory if it is an elegant model, if it describes a wide class of observations, and if it predicts the results of new observations. Beyond that, it makes no sense to ask if it corresponds to reality, because we do not know what reality is independent of a theory. (Hawking, 1993, p. 44)

In order to explore the utility of TPD in reconsidering how the participants viewed themselves and others in spaces striving for inclusion, co-participants first needed an introduction to the basic aspects of the theory. This was done through a series of short presentations including using Lego blocks to demonstrate how I first conceptualized a similar theory when I was working in a women's shelter; this was followed by a short YouTube video

with an RSA animation of the theory, and finally an interactive poster that I had designed showing the dynamics between various aspects of the theory. I also made available to co-participants some of Dabrowski's original texts. They were quiet and focused as I presented the information, and I found it difficult to gauge what they were thinking. I opened up the floor to initial questions.

Clarifying and Constructing TPD

Addressing participants' immediate reactions, I clarified and constructed knowledge surrounding two aspects of the theory: levels and universal values.

Levels. I suggested that the levels were important, not in characterizing those around us, but rather as a tool for self-understanding when reflecting on our emotional responses to what was happening in our environment, connecting them back to the practice/idea of auto-psychotherapy. I also suggested that the levels might have value to psychologists and counsellors who were attempting to pinpoint the source of their client's anxiety/depression and address it in a way that allowed them to see it differently.

Universal values. I explained Dabrowski (1977, p. 221) insisted that universal values not be imposed, but rather lived by example, making Level 5 a space where the individual is able to live in the world true to their own self-selected values and not necessarily intending to change the world for anyone other than themselves.

After making these clarifications it was time to take a break. I distributed sticky notes to the group to give those who may not have felt comfortable posing questions in front of the group an opportunity to ask questions in a more discreet manner, knowing it was important to share as thorough an understanding of the theory as possible.

Dissonance, Assonance and Resonance with TPD: The Sticky Notes

Immediate reactions. The collection of sticky notes attached to posters were mixed and can be best captured under the headings of what made sense, what didn't make sense, lingering questions, all of which provided a solid foundation for further exploration and discussion of the theory.

What made sense. There was a clear openness to the idea that individuals “experience life differently” and may “experience[e] their emotions in a more sensitive way” which could result in “living outside the norms of society” or conversely being met with “enmity.” The role of the overexcitabilities in creating potentially “higher high and lower lows,” rendering individuals “more prone for disappointment and falling into depression/committing suicide,” was also identified as something that made sense. Several participants recognized the familiarity with the concept of “growth through struggle” whether “learning a new skill” or “searching for deeper meaning” or considering the possibility that “trauma leads to growth whether mental, spiritual, or physical”.

What did not make sense. The biggest struggle with the theory came from the concept of the levels. One struggle came from the perception that the levels appeared hierarchical and “the idea that some people are inherently incapable of exceeding Level 1 or 2” and the subjectivity involved in “How can we judge/know others' experience?” Another shared the belief that “it is our ability as humans to be self-aware and understand ourselves and society at a fundamental level that defines us above other animals,” questioning whether “humans are born with emotional intensity, but some retain this intensity better than others,” suggesting that the varying levels of retaining this intensity could inform why giftedness should be considered on a spectrum. Another asked “Why does the theory sound so dystopian or apocalyptic? It's like they're saying, ‘If you

don't get to level 5 you're going to be stuck in level 1 forever!" Another participant wondered, "If level 1 is the 'collective' or 'status quo' then the level 5 could become level 1 as everyone breaks away from the norm" characterizing Level 5 as the realm of a rebel which was reflected in another response "they fight to change society, so then everyone would conform" creating a perceived loop where "people lose individuality." Another worried that TPD "makes it seem as if people need to become level 5, there would be no order because everyone's encouraged to think outside the box."

Beyond the questioning of the levels, there were questions such as "Life isn't a straight line or trajectory, are there other dimensions?" as well as a sense that the theory "does not factor in outside help" factoring in a disquietude with the idea that "no one can reach level 5 without luck/circumstance moving them along." One saw the theory as "only mak[ing] sense in a post-modern society where people think they're special" while another didn't "really understand how much of a role that this scale plays in our society this present day."

Lingering questions. Many of the questions that co-participants still had centred around the levels. One participant asked, "Who can define truly, who belongs in Level 1 or 5" with another wondering who creates the levels: "If level 5 makes the social norms is the only difference in between level 1 and 5 the fact that they create or follow? If that's true, then why is Level 1 and 5 viewed as more important or less important?" This was further explored by two other participants who questioned the impact of variabilities between values and cultures. This too may be reflected in the worry that "the theory can only be used with a condescending attitude." One participant questioned the point of the levels if "Level 5s need Level 1s to 'stand out' while another wondered whether "being a 'Level 5' [just] means you have dealt with stuff in a positive way."

There were still fears of dystopian consequences with one participant querying whether a child raised with the theory would “grow up as sanctimonious, thinking they were better than everyone else” or conversely “hating everything about it.” Another question explored the idea of a “false disintegration” and whether it is “possible to think you are reaching a higher level when in reality you are following different societal norms/instincts instead of questioning pre-existing ones?” And then there was this. “If the theory is true, what does it say about the human condition?”

School applications. I then shared with them a puppet play (Appendix A) that I hoped would help them to understand the school applications of the theory, sharing with them Aronson’s (1964) reflections on the evolution of the theory.

Something more than meaningfully defined concepts is necessary for a theory to achieve scientific status. It must show broader explanatory power than alternate theoretical models. As described above, the phenomena conceptualized by Dabrowski can be stated in other theoretical terms. Moreover, a theory of personality is functional. It is relevant to a broad range of problems: treating emotionally disturbed patients, planning educational programs, and raising children. (p xxvii)

I was very nervous about performing the puppet play and so by way of introduction I shared the process I went through in creating the puppet play as a presentation at the 2018 Dabrowski Congress held in Chicago. I recounted how I wanted to get feedback from academics who were very familiar with the theory around how I viewed the school applications of the theory. I explained that while it had felt like a huge risk to bring a puppet play to an academic conference, it had been well received and I had made some minor changes based on the feedback. At first the students seemed a little uncomfortable watching me fumble with some of my puppetry skills, but

when I indicated at a certain point that I had intended a particular line as a joke, they all laughed and things appeared to be more relaxed from that point on. Their expressions were very thoughtful and they were very generous in their applause at the end. We then broke for lunch and they had time to visit, reflect and peruse some of the resources that I had brought with me.

Flight Recorder 021019PM: Phase 1: Discovery

After lunch, I was excited to begin the first phase in the AI cycle where “interviews are conducted, stories are shared, and themes are identified that cut across the many stories and high point experiences” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 104) as part of a process of discovery. To prepare for the interview process I wanted to set the tone for the afternoon by asking them to think of someone that they really admired and consider what it was that they admired and if there was a story or core virtue that exemplified why they had chosen this individual. After a couple of co-participants shared their stories, I introduced them to the virtues that we would require for the discovery process that we would be engaging in over the course of the afternoon: appreciation and perceptiveness. In addition, I shared with them how their stories and what they would be sharing was important qualitative data and the difference between qualitative and quantitative data and the importance of their individual stories and perspectives.

At this point, the group was ready to work through the interview questions. (See Appendix B) I allowed for considerable flexibility in this process to accommodate small groups, and individuals to work through the interview questions. I also made myself available for working through interview questions and one participant took me up on that offer. Many moved to more comfortable spaces scattered throughout the space. At first, it felt awkward and quiet, and while this made me wonder whether I could have been more formal in setting up the interviews, I also trusted them to make choices of how and with whom to share. In the end,

groups varied in size from two to four, with many responding to the questions individually. I met with one co-researcher one-on-one; one other participant answered the questions with me over the phone several days after the summit.

Before we ended the day, I asked that co-participants begin the process of analysis by working through the concluding questions individually, reflecting on what struck them through the interview process with a few sharing their favorite stories and quotes with the group. At the end of the day, I collected exit slips on which some thanked me for the day and the opportunity to be a part of the research; several gave me recommendations for snacks and food for our next meeting. My recollection of that day in my research journal was one of magic:

A completely diverse group and they were so respectful and so generous...honestly, once again I feel such faith in humanity because of them. I cannot wait to dive into the information they shared and then put it into a format where we can all look at it again with highlighters and pens! There is a part of me that will need to resist the urge to editorialize because I can already see that it is full of golden nuggets. (Research Journal, October 3, 2019)

Transcribing and collating the responses to the interview questions, I was overwhelmed by the trust that had been placed in both the group and the process. When asked about experiences that they remembered as contributing to their growth as individuals, the responses were as diverse as the group. From travelling independently for the first time, coming to terms with their sexuality, challenging various types of bullying, accomplishing difficult tasks, achieving personal goals, losing a parent, letting go of expectations, being called to lead- the stories demonstrated the diverse experiences which find their way into classrooms every day. There was a moment when I wished I could dwell in these stories, explore each of them one-on-

one with my participants, to not only acknowledge that I had heard them, but to give them the opportunity to fully express them.

Sometimes in the recorded interviews, it sounded like someone had something more to say but the opening never appeared. Some of the interview sheets with questions left unanswered made me wonder if the paper was too imposing or if I should have made myself more available to further explore. In the end, I accepted that some stories were not ready to be shared, some stories only come in small fragments, some stories take more time than others, and some stories simply have no words to tell them. I also realized that in articulating my “phenomenon of interest” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 123) through the introduction and exploration of TPD, some participants may have struggled to find stories that “fit with, enlarge[d], or shift[ed] the social and theoretical conversations” (ibid) in which we were engaged in. Reed (2007) reminds that AI “takes time to switch from a defensive way of responding to one that explores strengths” (p. 40). The added dynamic of appreciating something that historically has been subordinated and associated with a lack of will and judgment (Ahmed, 2015, p. 3) may have also been a factor. Ultimately, in AI the focus is not on what may not have been able or ready to be shared, but instead it is on what was shared and “the factors and forces that served as fertile ground” (Cooperrider, et al. 2008, p. 6), in this case, personality development as described through TPD. Within the collated data sets, we discovered much fertile ground from which we could begin to dream.

Flight Recorder 151019PM: Phase 2: Dream

I was excited to meet with the co-participants two weeks later. Only 18 of the original 24 returned and while there were two whom I did not hear from, the others who did not return had been called out of town, fell ill or had other more pressing obligations. One co-participant shared

that they felt uncomfortable discussing their interview responses from the first meeting with the group and did not want to continue. It made me wonder if perhaps I should have been a little clearer about what the second day would entail; this may have offered reassurance around how we would engage with the data from the discovery phase. While I wished that I could have spent more time with each participant to debrief their experience more fully, I felt a deep respect for their boundaries.

We began the second day reintroducing the returning group of eighteen using a warm-up activity where participants toss a ball of yarn to other participants, identifying a connection between them and offering a metaphor for the work that we would undertake over the course of the day as we intended to weave stories and strengths into provocation propositions for the future. Prior to moving into the Dream Phase, I ensured that I had addressed their sticky note questions about the theory, from Day 1, in a meaningful way. I touched again on the differences between the levels and distinguishing the difference between Level 5 and what some would consider a rebel as well as the notion of universal vs. relative values. I also returned to the idea of the TPD as a personal tool to support autopsychotherapy and individual development reminding them that the levels aren't necessarily hierarchical as life will continue to offer us situations that require us to re-examine all that we believe and value.

After re-orienting students to the theory, we moved on to the Dream Phase that included appreciative focal questions to address whether TPD offered them a news lens with respect to their own emotional expressions, as well as the emotional expression of others.

In his work, *On Authentic Education*, Dabrowski (n.d) saw positive maladjustment, something he described as “the way in which a person progresses from [these] lower levels of reflexive behavior to the higher levels of development as seen in conscious reflective actions” (p.

42) as “acting together with self-education, nervousness and autopsychotherapy to enhance the development of the individual” (p. 43). The responses to focal question one (see Figure 1) reflects an understanding of this aspect of the theory through highlighting the connection between emotions and values. I have included the responses to both questions below as they provide both an appreciation of the thoughtful sense-making of my co-researchers, but also offer a starting point for how we engaged with the data and additional phases of the inquiry.

Star Sighting: Focal Question 1

Question 1 asked participants to consider the following statement: “I have embraced my emotions and the inner milieu and the role they/it play in who I am and who I am becoming; how has this changed how I navigate the world and the challenges that come my way?” (see Figure 2 for participants’ raw responses).

Figure 2

Focal Question One Raw Responses

Co-Researcher	Question 1 Response
Jack	I understand stimulus that evokes emotion from me and appreciate both the emotions of myself and others. With this knowledge I would be able to better focus on what I want to do as well as how I want to go about doing it.
Gabby	Being able to acknowledge my emotions and where they come from allows me to overcome challenges easier because I’m no longer shocked at my reactions to things. It’s one less hurdle to jump over.
Daniela	By embracing my emotions and anxiety I have been able to navigate through the world quicker. By embracing my emotions as normal things that come and go I am able to use them to my benefit. They help me understand and learn more about myself. By embracing my emotions and seeing them as something positive it stops them from becoming toxic and extremely crippling. Emotions are inevitable but what you do with them and how you respond to them affect whether or not you grow as an individual.
Carter	I think that by embracing my emotions and the role that they play has allowed me to go through challenges better than before. I have become more self-reflective which has significantly changed the way I look at the world and how problems are dealt with. Also, by embracing my emotions, when going through challenges I understand myself more and what the best decisions are which really helps.

- Grace I don't think this has caused me to embrace my emotions any more or less than it did before but it's given me a new lens through which to process them. I think the first time I was really forced to embrace my emotions was the summer before grade 10, which I spent most of in what I now recognize as a huge disintegrative experience. Suddenly I was having doubts about the way the world worked, my identity, my family, my friends, and my future. I was scared of my emotions, not because of the feeling itself, but because of how I feared others would perceive me if I showed my emotions and let them affect the way I live my life. That was the beginning of a long process, which I'm not sure will ever end, leading me to where I am today, as a high school senior and clinging to these last few months of being in an environment I understand and have mastered the art of navigating before my whole world turns upside down again when I graduate and move out this summer. I know that when your world crumbles you can rebuild it and it will be okay, and you really should let yourself feel your emotions and explore why you feel that way so your fears and doubts can't control you.
- Medea Generally this just brings greater understanding. It helps rationalize the problems and reactions that feel random and unreasonable. I used to get really overwhelmed at any challenge, and would want to just give up, but now it's just a matter of putting in the time to calm down and break down the issue into smaller, more manageable tasks. It's also helped with validating the anxiety or depressive episodes, which used to cause a lot of doubt in self-worth and feelings of incompetence. Knowing there's a reason/cause of problems like that helps me to understand that it'll get better.
- Nathaniel Have I really embraced my emotions? Probably not. I've gotten better at it though so from what I can tell is that letting yourself feel something makes me feel more at ease about the choices I make afterwards. The consequences of those actions are more bearable because I know I acted true to myself. Ex: If I got mad at someone for doing something I view immoral and act on it, I'm fine with the after effects that come.
- Caitrin I find that I am less sure of what I do and the choices I make and more sure of my own awareness. I tend to see things from a more three-dimensional point of view, and I generally try to see the complexities of a situation, environment, or person. Intellectually, things tend to be a bit more definitive. The idea of objective truth implies a general lack of grey areas (although, this is not always the case.) Emotionally, the world is infinitely complex. By understanding and embracing my emotions in harmony with logic, I tend to see more perspectives. However, this makes it difficult for me to decide on anything, especially when other people are involved. Being empathetic toward both my own conflicting values and the conflicting values of others makes it virtually impossible to ever come to a true consensus, either internally or externally. I second guess myself, and rarely feel 100% satisfied when I do make a decision. Fortunately, I find some comfort in knowing that I consider options before deciding anything, so while I'm rarely satisfied with what I do, I know I wasn't doing it uninformed, so at the very least I have made a partially acceptable decision.
- Brigid Has there ever been an analysis of people's brains while they are going through disintegration? I once experienced a disintegration while at Mighty Peace Day. Earlier that month I had read Three Cups of Lies, a book about how the people who run charities, specifically Greg Mortenson. I can't remember exactly the names, but how this man, who was viewed by many as a great man by all accounts a level 5 really wasn't all that noble, exposing the misconceptions we had, that his stories were embellished to make them more interesting, that he was taking more money than was acceptable from his charity and many other things all proving him to be a level 1. Having never heard of him, I was less alarmed that I would have been otherwise, but

when I went to Mighty Peace Day I realized that I really had no proof that these people were all that good or noble.

Katie

I can walk with more confidence and a sense of self-assurance.

Zoe

For me I think the last piece of the puzzle in a sense was when my best friend moved away. Why I think we were best friends was because in almost everything, especially school, she was in the eyes of the students and most of the teachers perfect. I was essentially the only person (other than her parents) who questioned her and her judgement. Now that she's not here, I realize that even though I questioned her, challenged her, so much of what I did revolved around her. I trust no one else's judgement as much as hers. There's a class trip and I want to go, but I feel like I'm holding my breath so I can hear her opinion. This has changed the way I think about everything. I don't give out true genuine trust much so now, I'm always questioning every single decision, without relieve and it's tiring.

I think knowing about this theory does help because there are signs you can look for, moral issues to question. For me, knowing this theory can only help, though I do know for others it isn't as simple as that. In my opinion the teachers should be the first ones to learn about it. I think it would be very beneficial to them.

#1

With logic in mind one navigates the world and completes challenges without asking questions. With emotion one perceives the routes in the world and faces challenges in a manner that identifies and clarifies what these routes and challenges are and what they really mean for them. If I see a truck facing me 2nd dimensionally, I can identify it and move away from harm. I can see 3 dimensionally and realize that the truck is not driving towards me, but instead backing away from me.

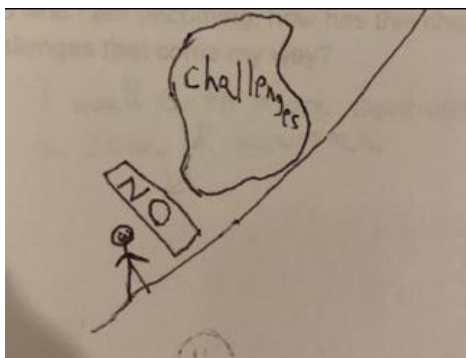
#2

Embracing emotions allows you to be aware, and also take them into account when making logical decisions.

#3

The theory definitely could be useful.

Strawberry Jam



Jack expressed how an awareness of the emotional stimulus prepared him to “better focus on what I want to do as well as how I want to go about doing it.” These sentiments were reflected in Carter’s observation that this understanding of emotions would make him “more

self-reflective” while Daniela saw that “emotions are inevitable but what you do with them and how you respond to them affect whether or not you grow as an individual.” Medea saw the theory as bringing meaning to “problems and reactions that feel random and unreasonable” as well as “validating the anxiety or depressive episodes, which used to cause a lot of doubt in self-worth and feelings of incompetence.” Gabby had a similar response seeing the theory as helping her manage “one less hurdle” as she is “no longer shocked at my reaction to things.” Caitrin examines how knowing the theory may not make life any simpler explaining how “understanding and embracing my emotions in harmony with logic, I tend to see more perspectives.” Carter initially views this as a complication as “being empathetic toward both my own conflicting values and the conflicting values of others makes it virtually impossible to ever come to a true consensus, either internally or externally” before resolving it through finding comfort in not making uninformed decisions that are at the very least “partially acceptable” which suggests an understanding of an awareness of a hierarchy of values. #1 and #2 both highlight the value of taking emotions into account when making logical decisions as “with emotion, one perceives the routes in the world and faces challenges in a manner that identifies and clarifies what these routes and challenges are and what do they really mean for them” (#1).

Ackerman (2009) suggests that “teaching someone about TPD can help him make sense of his inner experiences and feelings of being different” perhaps even to the extent of providing “insight into how people around the world differ” (p. 93). While the responses seem to give evidence of the possibility for increased self-understanding, the second focal question was written to explore the more global applications.

Star Sighting: Focal Question 2

In posing the second focal question, “Conversely, now that I can see others’ emotional responses in an appreciate way, how has it shifted how I interact with them?” I hoped to explore the idea that even though everyone might not experience or relate to TPD or experience it in different ways, that knowing the theory might still have value in how we perceive others who may be struggling in inclusive spaces. The question itself invites a level of disintegration in the asking as it seeks to “interrupt the automatism of our everyday attitudes and activities” (Dabrowski, n.d., p.87) invoking one of the dynamisms Dabrowski describes in TPD (see Figure 3 for participants’ raw responses). It is the subject/object orientation which “causes us to view others as separate entities and personalities, i.e., they are individual, not repeatable, unique and possess their own life independent from ours” (ibid., p. 88) a realization which has the potential to change who we are by how we respond to others.

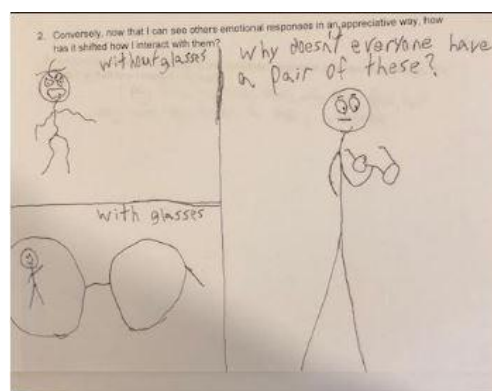
Figure 3

Focal Question Two Raw Responses

Co-Researcher	Question 2 Response
Jack	I would be more thoughtful of emotions exhibited by others instead of categorizing “good” or “bad” emotions. Everyone has a different take and stance of life and why they do the things they take part in. Being able to better support others and help them understand their emotional stimuli would be beneficial throughout my entire life. However, this philosophy on human psyche may not be applicable in every situation as there will always be exceptions.
Gabby	I find I have more patience and I’m able to analyze situations and people and act accordingly in a way that would help us most. When people act out or feel an overwhelming amount of emotion, it’s more of a “I’ve been there” moment for me.
Carter	I think by seeing others emotional responses in an appreciative way I interact with them a lot differently. Before, I viewed everyone in a way that we all experienced the same emotions at the same point, however after seeing it differently, I am more thoughtful interacting with others.

- Caitrin Again I tend to see things with a broader perspective. I try to respect the values and thoughts of others, whether I agree with them or not, because I understand that they most likely have similar conflicts to mine. Truly simple minds do not exist, and I have begun to realize that other people have similar doubts about their own values. Even if I disagree with them, I know it is not because one of us is necessarily wrong. I value the input they have, and I try to interact with others with a mindset of understanding rather than persuasion or dominance.
- Katie I pay more attention to them, why they feel that way and try harder to help and understand.
- Zoe I think in total I've seen something as always being black and white and now I see more grey because I'm thinking about the "Why?" It's made me question more and more things and I try harder to think about what I say and do more than ever.
- #2 It changes the perspective in which you view them and allows you to have a broader mindset in how you interact with them.
- #4 It hasn't changed how I interact with them, since I only interact with them to help them in something but changed how I see them. I feel more comfortable being around them. Earlier I would try to avoid them (not all the time). Now I am okay being around them.

Strawberry Jam



Many of the responses seem to suggest that knowing the theory could have the potential to interrupt how we might view others, as demonstrated in Strawberry Jam's visual depiction of how a new lens changes what you see. JB spoke of being "more thoughtful of emotions exhibited by others instead of categorizing 'good' or 'bad' emotions", with the understanding that "everyone has a different take and stance of life and why they do the things they take part in." SS indicated that while it wouldn't necessarily change their interactions, it "changed how I see them. I feel more comfortable being around them." Recognizing that others might be struggling in

ways that are familiar to her, Gabby stated, “I have more patience and I’m able to analyze situations and people and react accordingly in a way that would help us most.” For Carter, his recognition that others may experience emotions differently means that he is “more thoughtful interacting with others.” That knowledge of the theory might lead to more **compassion for others** was a common theme.

Participants also expressed difficulty with the notion of viewing others as “subjects.” Nathaniel felt it would be difficult to change how he interacts with others: “Knowing why I act as I do doesn’t help to understand why others do. It’s actually harder, because in my mind I assume others have my values and should have them if they don’t.” Grace shared that the question made her feel “a little self-centred for only having grown in how I see myself and not others, but I think that’s natural as a teenager who still doesn’t really understand the world, I need to figure out myself and my identity before I can understand others.” Still other participants felt a new obligation toward others in their inclusive spaces. Medea shared that “being able to understand the emotional responses of others kind of ensures that I have to change how I interact with them. Morally speaking, it wouldn’t be okay to feign ignorance just to make it easier on myself” adding that this would require additional mental energy. This is further reflected in #1’s response “I feel that it is my obligation to understand and acknowledge their emotion, otherwise I would have failed myself as a person who also has emotions.” These responses echo Dabrowski’s assertion that when we see others as ‘subjects’ with lives and experiences of value that are independent from our own, we are awakening a “more complicated hierarchy of values” (n.d. p. 3) that, in turn, impacts how we treat them.

Caitrin’s response illustrates the complicated nature of these values as she reflects Dabrowski’s cautionary note that our understanding towards others does not serve our own self-

interest (n.d., p. 88). “I value the input they have, and I try to interact with others with a mindset of understanding rather than persuasion or dominance.” (Caitrin). Jack also included a caution in his response that while knowing the theory might be beneficial for him “to better support others and help them understand their emotional stimuli,” he also felt that “this philosophy on human psyche may not be applicable in every situation as there will always be exceptions.” This observation underscores the idea that all emotional expressions may not be an indication of opportunities for development, something that is also central to the theory, the differences embedded within those same levels that were so troublesome to the group.

Exploring the application of TPD to educational practice, Dabrowski (n.d.) described authentic as “this combination of an appreciation of personal dignity towards others with the same attitude toward ourselves which in turn transfers these attitudes to the group” (p. 2). Recasting emotion and emotional responses as drivers of personality development is a key part of the process as it “presents a coherent picture of the whole individual” (p. 3) that allows us to appreciate, in ourselves and others, aspects that may not always have been visible or valued. The responses to the focal questions demonstrate an openness to this recasting and positioned our group well for engaging in the exploring inclusive spaces for those things that recognize and support emotion as a driver of development, which Dabrowski would view as a contribution to authentic education.

Flight Recorder 151019AM2: Phase 3: Design Features of and/or Practices Within Inclusive Spaces Supporting Personality Development Through Positive Disintegration

The uncertainty principle, however, reveals that macroscopic averaging obscures a wealth of microscopic activity. As we will see shortly, this frenzy is the obstacle to merging general relativity and quantum mechanics. (Greene, 1999, p. 120)

After completing the focal questions, we were ready to review the stories and observations collected during the first day of our summit. I prefaced my distribution of the data sets with the words of Thomas King (2003) where he tells his audience “Don’t say that in the years to come you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (p. 29), in an attempt to communicate to them the power of a story as well as the task that lay before us: to take the positive core from the stories and dream possibilities for the future. Careful to remind them that while all of our dreaming may not result in immediate action within our district, the value of the journey was that there may be implications that we may not have even considered as the work we did together would be shared locally and through various levels of publication.

The interview questions were divided into three separate data sets. The first and longest contained the stories that had been shared in response to the questions. The second contained the concluding questions which reflected on aspects of those same stories. The third contained the I dreaming questions, where individuals had begun the process of imagining a different future, one where a new appreciation of our own and others emotions in shared learning spaces had shifted to support personality development. Quiet time allowed the participants to read carefully through the data sets, highlighting things that had resonance. Having been so affected by the stories during transcription, this was a very difficult point in the day for me. As much as I didn’t want a single story or detail to be overlooked, I also didn’t want to be overly direct in identifying themes or for that matter, or to imply somehow that I saw some stories as more important than others. I had to keep reminding myself to trust the process.

After reading through the appreciative interview response data sets, I offered the participants the opportunity to make their way through the Concluding Observations and

Dreaming questions from the first day as a means to begin sorting through key themes and ideas. Some quotes were added to the list, while others were highlighted to indicate resonance with the ideas. Using this data as a springboard, they were then organized into grade groups, and asked to use what they had learned from the data sets, to formulate a response to the foundational questions. The decision for organizing them into grade groups was multifaceted. The first and foremost was the size of the groups based on the attendance on the first day of the summit. The second was in part due to my perception that during the first summit day, the grade nine students had been a quieter group, perhaps because they were the youngest of the participants, and it was my hope to perhaps offer some support in expressing themselves fully during the second day of the summit by grouping them together. In the end, six participants did not return the second day so my grade eleven and twelve groups were smaller than expected and my grade nine group was very vocal and made it quite clear they did not need my support in facilitating a discussion. As a result, I circulated the space, adding clarification where I could.

In the process of AI, the foundational questions are based on the premise that “continuity, novelty and transition are necessary capacities that exist in healthy tension” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 24). The exploration of stories that had been shared in an effort to understand what made a difference for individuals as they navigated their peak and growth experiences, as well as moments infused with exploring and acting on their values, were rich with possibilities that also honoured aspects of their learning experiences that had gone well. The next step was to open them to novelty: what could be possible if we were able to drop the “usual restrictions of resources and relationships” in order to avoid “too many limits on ideas” (Reed, 2007, p. 33). My goal was to have co-participants imagine the inclusive classroom of the future, one with a shared understanding of TPD and a new appreciation of the role of emotions in

development. What became clear to me as they explored this question, was my own bias toward the theory, based on what may have been both an understanding of the complexity and depth of the theory as well as my privileged position in working with students identified as gifted in small groups for the previous decade.

Grade Twelve Group

The grade twelve group imagined a future where teachers had a better understanding of varying thought processes and were more flexible and accepting by addressing individual student needs. Classrooms would emphasize the process of learning over statistical results, and learning would not be forced, creating a climate where students showing up genuinely wanting to learn. They talked about different teaching styles to accommodate different students, flexible attendance options, and student selection of their own teachers. Essentially, these students were looking at self-advocacy and self-efficacy - being respected for their ability to self-identify and direct their own learning. Strawberry Jam's story highlights this vision:

Then two teachers from another room invited me to their room and it was just an introduction to a friendly environment, and they asked if I wanted to stay and within a week or two I was integrated into that room. I was in grade six. At this point I was working at a grade three level. Within the last half of my grade six year I jumped several levels and by the end of the year I was at a grade seven level in math and started grade eight math the next year. The teachers actually took the time to look at my work and if they didn't understand my writing, they would actually ask me instead assuming I was wrong. That year, grade six, I won the striving for excellence. Eventually the teachers took over the whole program because they were doing a good job. The peak was the

tremendous growth at the end of grade six and I was recognized for growth rather than being separated because I was hindering others' growth.

Grade Eleven and Grade Ten Groups

The responses from both the grade eleven and grade ten groups reflected a dystopic vision of the future fueled by an interpretation of TPD that classified students according to the levels and the implications of what that might mean. The grade eleven group was concerned that students are being put into places where they feel stuck; they juxtaposed stories where students struggled with existing divides with stories that spoke of growing through independence and opportunities to reflect on self. But they also suggested that if the theory were understood fully, a future where giftedness had more gradients and less judgments about emotions, might be possible. The grade tens seemed to envision additional splintering both within the regular school system and the gifted program, fueled by an ongoing obsession of our present system with testing and labels. Lack of flexibility in thinking would result in early labelling, with more separation of learners. Individuals would prevail over teamwork, level 1s relegated to only basic studies, while level 5s are pressured to excel in all areas of leadership. The stories that resonated with them were those around the separation of learners to assist their learning.

While initially I was worried about the “dystopian” view of the future that was shared by the two groups, I did not want to “oppressively prohibit any talk of difficulties or problems” which Reed (2007, p. ix) states as one of the criticisms of AI. Some of the participants shared that they were presently studying dystopian literature which may have influenced their dreaming, but I also wondered if the stories of being misunderstood or even coming to terms with being

identified as gifted could be part of this. It felt important to let it be a part of the conversation, especially as it was drawing attention back to aspects of the theory that gave the participants concerns. The first was the use of the levels to characterize others by those who may not understand the use of the levels for self-understanding. Stemming from this also a concern that the levels might be perceived as fixed thus not honoring the element of growth inherent within them as well as the degree to which movement is not a single trajectory encompassing all dimensions of human experience. The fear that values might not be self-selected but imposed, also seemed to be an issue in their perceived future. While we had already reviewed and clarified these concerns together, I was again made aware of how a lack of depth to understanding the theory and its applications could be misconstrued and do more damage than good.

Grade Nine Group

The grade nine group had a very lively conversation from which emerged a Gifted Manifesto. They challenged the question of “What is smart?” suggesting that the future have different ways of identifying students for gifted programming that included tests and projects. In addition, teachers would have a better understanding of giftedness through learning from experts and thereby “create different ways to learn.” Circling back to some of what the grade twelve group said, this group felt that teachers would “relinquish control of the classroom” and have “therapistac [sic] training”. Teaching focused on success and students identified as gifted were not only helped and challenged, but also developed an understanding of what it means to be labelled as gifted.

One aspect of the dream phase is to look for ways to expand existing potential that presently exists within the classrooms and schools in which the participants find themselves. It adds practicality to the dream through recognizing “continuity is a necessary part of change or

transformation” (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008, p. 23). To get at this idea of continuity, I asked the participant groups what core strengths/programs/relationships already existed that facilitated the dream they had envisioned. What was very interesting was that while they were able to identify many programs that could be built upon (IB Program, AP classes, Gifted Education Program, French Immersion, RAP), the overwhelming issue was around access. If specialized programs were available at both district high schools, students wouldn’t have to choose between social groups and programs of choice. Option courses were also viewed as an area for growth; re-envisioned as a vital part of the school experience and not of less value than core subjects meaning that they would be led by specialist teachers passionate about their discipline and able to infuse this passion into the classroom. This along with the availability of shorter courses allowed students to test out more options to gain a better understanding of their own interests and potential. The Gifted Program had been expanded to include another teacher and more students dispelling the general misunderstanding around giftedness and providing opportunities to educate more people about giftedness as well as offering time for reflection and self-understanding for identified students.

Flight Recorder 151019PM1: Foundational Questions

In reviewing the foundational questions, a number of common themes were identified as emerging from the data set. They included student control, respectful relationships, removing stigmas around giftedness and emotions and the damage caused by labels and lack of understanding, opportunities to pursue passions as well as equity across the disciplines (options) and finally that personal growth requires patience. To find these themes at the heart of the dreams felt like a firm foundation for our next steps.

Cooperrider et al (2008) write that “the *Dream* [italics in quotation] phase amplifies the positive core and challenges the status quo by envisioning more valued and vital futures than those that are currently envisioned by the organization members and stakeholders” (p. 44). I felt privileged to be present as dreams were being discussed and envisioned, whether through dystopian storylines or others, because this was a time of active engagement. The participants spoke in earnest and bouts of laughter had as much a place as collective groans while data sets were tapped on as dreams were being developed. At this point I wished for more time but honoured the schedule, once again trusting that the next phase in the cycle, that of design, would pick up on the energy supplied by the dream.

Moving into the next stage of the design phase I shared the book *Imagine A Day* (Thomson, 2005) with extraordinary illustrations by Rob Gonsalves to set the tone for the afternoon. We then reviewed the responses to the four foundational questions as our starting point for creating provocative propositions with the purpose of focusing our study in a very tangible way on what could be done differently (Reed, 2007, p. 173). I borrowed some design elements from Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008) to provide some initial guidance around aspects of classrooms striving for inclusion that could be addressed through these propositions. These possibilities highlighted some specific aspects of a classroom that could be considered including: authenticity, beliefs about power and authority, communication, competencies, culture, education, policies, practices and principles, relationships, shared values, social responsibility, vision and purpose (p. 164). Along with these I shared with them a handout that included guidelines for good provocative propositions (Appendix C). Taking all of this into consideration, the following provocative propositions emerged from the groups.

Provocative Propositions

1. What if we piloted a program where high school gifted students mentored younger gifted students? High school students could still be connected to the program, and still supported.
2. What if students had total control over their own learning?
3. What if there were more ways to get into the gifted program? (i.e., passion project)
4. What if there were broader degrees of separation based on abilities and needs?
5. What if accommodations were integrated into classrooms and all students had access to them?

Some concerns that had not been formulated into questions included:

1. Label debunking-teaching kids about giftedness.
2. Revisit authority and control.
3. Open access to help.

After generating and sharing the propositions with the large group, I invited the participants to reflect individually on the propositions and find those that resonated. They used a graphic organizer to map out potential pathways that might need engagement at different levels (individual, classroom, school, district and into the broader world).

Graphic organizers clearly reflected a desire for more opportunities to connect through various configurations of mentorship as well as more opportunities for students to participate in gifted programming through multiple ways of accessing gifted programming. Through mentorship, “we use our own experiences to help younger kids navigate life with the ‘gifted’ title, learn how to navigate their reality, teach them to advocate for themselves to access learning support they need” (Grace). By expanding access to the program, it would “be valued by

everyone and not just teachers and the ones who are in it” through offering increased understanding towards gifts in other domains and the importance of supporting them (Carter). There was also support for more control of learning allowing for “increase[d] diversity for what students can learn” and “allow[ing] students to be self-sufficient” (Jack). That accommodations be integrated into every classroom and accessible to all students was also touched upon as well the need for “more empathy and understanding for students at different academic levels” resulting in “more flexibility toward students changing classes or requesting teachers based on self-identified needs” (Caitrin). Reviewing the responses, my overwhelming sense was the need to feel connected to those who may be able to offer understanding and support as well as recognition of the how individual the learning journey is and the importance of feeling in control of navigating that journey through opportunities for growing self-awareness.

Flight Recorder 151019PM2: Phase 4: Destiny

Prior to leaving at the end of the second and final day of the summit, I asked each participant for a final exit slip asking for one thing about the process we went through, the stories that were shared, or something that they learned about the theory that would remain after we parted. Their responses filled me with a sense of hope that the process had been valuable (see Figure 4 for participants’ exit slip comments).

With the exit slips, the second day was complete, and we all returned to our respective lives and settings, not entirely sure what form destiny would take as a result of our time together. I couldn’t help but reflect on that final exit slip, the one that spoke about how a feeling of freedom and control could make such a difference. In TPD, Dabrowski asserts that the hierarchy of values within the inner milieu be self-selected, underscoring the importance of freedom and individual control in personality development. The importance of freedom and control is also reflected in

the provocative propositions, with a desire for more control of learning opportunities as well as access to various supports. But alongside freedom and control, there is also the desire for connection, whether through increased understanding of the nature of giftedness or reaching out to others through mentorship.

Figure 4

Final Exit Slips

Theory based responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I learnt about Dabrowski's levels. That will probably remain with me after I leave today. ● I feel as though the thought process behind providing help for not only gifted kids but anyone struggling in general is wonderful and a great way forward for [our school district]. ● I didn't realize how much the theory of positive disintegration impacted everyday life and all people. ● People innately are level one. Perhaps abstract symbols would be better for people to understand the idea (as opposed to levels?) ● Emotions are telling. Learn from them, feel them. ● That self-growth is an important part of our development and having schools help us develop this principle is imperatively paramount. ● The fact that emotions and anxiety are temporal but the things we learn about ourselves and about the world around us through the disintegrative experience stays with us for almost forever.
Gifted based responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All of us had very similar experiences as gifted students and our time together talking has been invaluable. Everyone has agreed it's been "therapeutic" and somewhat validating to share our thoughts, ideas and experiences and to all be truly listened to and taken seriously. GL ● The idea of using giftedness as a tool of understanding rather than a label to force on people CS ● A thing that seemingly every single gifted student shares is the struggle to live up to our potential, and the expectation that our non-gifted friends, parents, and mentors have of us. ● The stories that other people had teachers who said "aren't you gifted/who's gifted? You should be able to answer this." I thought that only happened at ****, hearing other people had the same experience, helped me realize how big of a problem this actually is. ZR ● It's just been amazing to have these conversations and learn about everyone here, the theory, as well as myself. Knowing that I'm not alone and that we can all relate and have had similar experiences truly means a lot to me. ● The main thing that I took from the process that we went through was that I learned more about myself as a gifted student, where I identify on the scale and also how much different others view the world than me.
General items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How people can learn in different ways, including some unusual method ● ...the theory, some stories, the discussions...just most of it. ● It is a bit vague in some places. One little item.

- I can't put it into words people will understand.
- The story of how the feeling of freedom and control can make such a big difference to someone.

In these provocative propositions, there is a recognition of the role we can play in one another's growth within a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). There is a desire for freedom from historical notions of what it means to be educated, whether gifted or not. That these emerged from an appreciative understanding of the role our emotions play in our development suggests that perhaps TPD has a role to play in connecting current theories of learning and authority in a way that supports inclusion. Perhaps, at some point in the future, Bill Bryson will reflect on this work as one of a series of serendipitous events that led to an era where inclusion is as ubiquitous as the virtues present within each of us. A future made possible through the appreciation and understanding of the role emotions play in development, connecting and committing us to those same virtues. I am at my core, if nothing else, an idealist.

In the months that followed the two days of data collection, so many things shifted in my life and the world at large. What I really wanted to do was start pulling together a team to explore the possibility of a mentorship program and examine the different forms it could take. I started thinking about revising my referral process and considered setting up a meeting with the student services team to see how we could rethink who was included in gifted programming. My brain also wanted to figure out how and where to begin a conversation around more student control over learning, in accessing support, in making choices and ultimately addressing the many levels of inclusion. But as my world disintegrated; first of all personally with the death of Mark, and then physically with the advent of social distancing as a result of COVID 19, and finally politically with a new government restructuring education, so many of my hopes to

celebrate and enact those provocative propositions began slipping away. Though I had shared with my participants that there were no guarantees that our research would result in any particular action, I could not help but feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility that I ought to make something happen, which only compounded the incredible disappointment when my program was officially cut in the final days of writing this dissertation.

I am rescued somewhat by the principles that form the foundation of AI by reassuring myself that not only is AI “a way of reclaiming imaginative competence” but also that inquiry and change go hand in hand (Cooperrider et al, 2008, pp. 8-9). I am hopeful that from our time together participants will see their “pasts, presents, and futures are endless sources of learning and inspiration or interpretation” and that through a different discourse they can mobilize these strengths into creating, and through TPD directing, their own futures (p. 9). Ultimately, it is the positive imagery and its relationship to positive action on a collective basis that “may be the strongest approach to co-creating a positive future” (ibid, p. 14). But what will all this mean for me as I move into a new role in my district, in my life as a widow and single mother, in my community where we must stay distant to keep everyone safe for an uncertain time, as we venture into an uncertain future?

It dawns on me that I have yet to include a song in this chapter of my thesis. That the universe has not whispered something in my ear to guide me has me feeling somewhat unsettled as with every other chapter, a song was there, either leading the way, interrupting perceptions, offering refuge, or providing direction. As everything disintegrates around me it makes me wonder if the reason the universe hasn't whispered anything for this chapter is because this song is an embodied melody that is wordless in how it will guide me through the upcoming challenges. That I have been moved and will continue to move as a result of the time that I have

spent with my co researchers is evident in how this work has helped to keep me going in spite of incredible losses. This song is an embodied song, impossible to write yet captured in a playful lyric I composed several years ago when this version of the future was both unfathomable and unimaginable. But in collecting this data we have proven that it is possible, with the right vessel, to enter a black hole and emerge with new possibilities for engaging with the world. A song will come, but until then, I have this.

The Unwritten Song

*You say you don't want me to write a song about you baby
 You say you don't want everyone to know what's in my heart
 Maybe you're scared that maybe I'll tell everyone our secrets
 Maybe you're right maybe there's things no one else should have a part of
 But there's a song that I sing when no one else is listening
 It wakes me in the morning and it holds me late at night
 It makes me dance even when my feet are heavy dragging like there's nowhere left to run
 to, nowhere left to hide except in a song I'll never write*

*I've got songs about injustice and songs about survival
 I've got songs about the future and the power of the land
 I've got songs about motherhood and the choices that we're making
 I've got songs that people tell me they just don't understand
 And I got a song that I sing when no one else is listening
 It wakes me in the morning and it holds me late at night
 It makes me dance even when my feet are heavy dragging like there's nowhere left to run
 to, nowhere left to hide except in a song I'll never write*

*And when I die maybe there'll be a moment of silence
 Where no one will remember the songs I used to play
 And in that moment all that's left will be the reverberations
 Of the music that we made together every single day*

*Cause there's a song that we sing when no one else is listening
It wakes us in the morning and it holds us late at night
It makes us dance even when our feet are heavy dragging like there's nowhere left to run
to, nowhere left to hide except in a song we'll never write*

Chapter 5: Worlds Within Teacher Worlds

...there are still abstract degrees of freedom coming together to form spacetime, but “where they are located” depends on how they are being observed. Space itself is not fundamental; it’s just a useful way of talking from certain points of view. (Carroll, 2019, p. 307)

*I guess I've been lucky he said
I still got my own teeth I got a place for my head
At the end of the day, when the darkness comes
I got no one to tell me my mind
No debts to pay, no secrets to hide
No fantasy to come undone
'Cause you can't miss what you've never had
And if it's never been good then this ain't so bad
So don't spread your illusions around here
'Cause hope's a lot like crack cocaine
It pumps the blood and it fills the brain with a longing
And there's never enough
No there's never enough*

In the 1980s, before becoming a teacher, I was an income security social worker where I worked with many adults who were struggling to fit into society’s expectations of them. From the schizophrenic who lived alone in the woods and came to town every few months for a food voucher, to the father of four who sold every tool despite being a mechanic before seeking assistance because of the deep shame associated with asking for help, there are many stories I could tell from that time of my career. But it was the stories that spoke of difficult school experiences that left me with the lingering question, “What if I had met them sooner?” When they were still students and perhaps required an awareness “that in many such children the deviation from the normal standard is a positive deviation and not negative, even though it often

introduces difficulties for parents and teachers who must understand the children and their individual behavior” (Dabrowski, n.d., p. 50)? It was my deep regard for them as adults, how they organized their lives to create meaning, how hard it was to trust, and how they responded to being treated with respect that influenced my change in careers, and, to this day, has kept me vigilant as a teacher to finding them in the classroom.

*I rejected your house and I keyed your car
 And I heard the tale of your rising star
 And how you got to be the leader of the pack
 With your strapped-up boots and your elbow grease
 You're sure there's no reason why folks like me
 Can't find a way to get to where you're at
 But you can't know what you've never seen
 And I've been places that you've never been
 So don't spread your illusions around here
 'Cause greed's a lot like crack cocaine
 It pumps your blood and it fills your brain with longing
 And there's never enough
 No there's never enough.*

I know it is important to remember that as a teacher, I am not a psychologist. However, the fact that disintegrations can “express themselves in severe states of disharmony, lack of self-control, severe neurosis and even psychosis” (Dabrowski, n.d., p. 50) means that teachers are often the first responders as well as responsible for ongoing interventions. Failure to see the disintegrative possibilities of what we are observing often has us focusing on the behaviors and the danger that, within objective observation and description, we “produce a fragmented and partial picture of the child instead of a coherent picture of his whole reality” (p. 3). Responding only to a unidimensional understanding of what we see could make a difference in whether a disintegration was positive or negative, the latter potentially resulting in “egoism, emotional

coldness, lack of empathy, rigidity, nervousness, lack of interception of other emotions, automatism and stereotypy” (p. 51). Now, not only have our classroom struggles with individual students been compounded, there is the potential that limited understanding could result in arrested development, something that may have far reaching reverberations.

*You can buy me a drink but you won't get my vote
 And I'll piss on the signs where you hang out your yoke
 Of promises to ordinary men
 Cause you've crossed that line and you can't come back
 You've armed your troops and launched the attack
 Destroying places you have never been
 But you can't miss what you've never known
 And you think your house is the only home
 Worthy of a dream
 But power's a lot like crack cocaine
 It pumps your blood and it fills your brain with longing
 And there's never enough
 No there's never enough.*

Revisiting the Summit with Teachers

In the precise way delineated by Einstein, special relativity resolves the conflict between our intuition about motion and the properties of light, but there is a price: individuals who are moving with respect to each other will not agree on their observations of either space or time. (Greene, 1999, p. 25)

Strangely enough, my day of research with my two teacher participants filled me with far more anxiety than meeting with my high school participants. Even more than a year ago, when I had finally framed my question and identified who I was going to invite as participants, the idea of recruiting teachers was far more unsettling than recruiting students. On a practical level, my worries extended from awareness of the demands placed on our learning support teachers in our

district as we strive for inclusion and how difficult it might be for them to commit time. The struggle we had with finding time to meet reflected this reality. Perhaps the biggest source of worry was the knowledge of how deeply the theory resonated with me. Could I share it in a way that opened space for thoughtful consideration and meaningful discussion? I deeply felt a responsibility to the students who had asked if it was possible for teachers to know what they assumed I knew about giftedness. And still on another level, despite being the coordinator of the program for my district and interacting with learning support teachers at various times during the school year, I often felt like a bit of an outsider, not a true member of any particular learning community, except for the one I had created with students in the program. This made me worry whether I was trusted, not being a true impartial outsider, yet not fully belonging.

When two of my colleagues volunteered to participate, I was overwhelmed with not only gratitude, but an enormous sense of responsibility that I use their time well and the hope that they would find value in the process. Veteran teachers with 18 and 20 years of teaching experiences at levels from K-9 and K-12, both had eight years of education beyond high school, beginning their teaching careers in areas other than their current role of learning support. When we finally met on a cold, snowy day in November, much had happened in my life between the initial recruitment meeting and when we began the collection of data. While the student participants had been unaware, the teachers knew about Mark's condition and as a result, the conversations around disintegration were a little different, the reality of my own situation reflected in some of the examples. How this may have changed the conversations is impossible to know.

There are right and wrong ways to divide the wave function into branches, and the right ways leave us with independent worlds that obey approximately classical laws of physics.

Which ways actually work is ultimately determined by the fundamental laws of nature, not by human whimsy. (Carroll, 2019, p. 236)

Flight Recorder 261119AM: Exploring the Theory of Positive Disintegration with Teachers Who Work to Support Inclusion

I followed the same format for the appreciative inquiry summit with the teacher participants as I did with the student participants. I had borrowed my sister's house for the day so we could have a private cozy space to meet with easy access to things like tea and snacks. I had the same resources available in the form of journals, sticky notes, and learning materials for sharing the theory. My co-researchers arrived early, and it was so nice to connect with them and hear how things were going in their lives and schools during a year when I was away. An informal setting, freedom from the rigid schedules of school, and the opportunity to connect about something important to us meant that the day proceeded with a much more laid-back pace than with the students. As we completed our own version of the four corners exercise that I had done with the students, I was impressed by what I didn't know about both of them despite having worked with them many times over the years. By the end of the activity, I had a clear sense of a deep commitment to their own education as well as the learning of students with whom they interacted daily.

In sharing the theory with them, I admit that I had expected and prepared for a lot more questions from the teachers around TPD than they had, perhaps due to the number of questions and concerns that the student researchers had shared when I had explored the theory with them. One reason for this may have been due, in part, to the fact that we were a much smaller group, and there was a lot more conversing as I utilized different means of sharing the theory. Another possibility is that they were both active in learning support roles and were adept in applying

different theories in trying to understand the students they were working with. Both had also had an opportunity to participate in professional development that addressed how trauma impacts individuals, making them familiar with the role of trauma in the disintegrative process as described by the theory. There also may have been more resonance for them right from the point of recruitment when they made the commitment to participate based on the description of the research which gave them a favorable disposition toward the theory. As I had already shared the theory with the student researchers and made adjustments to the presentation of the theory based on the aspects that confused them, I may have done a better job of sharing it the second time. As well, I had worked with each of the teachers in the past, supporting various students which allowed us to apply the TPD lens to specific situations. Whatever the case, their final reflections on the theory included recognition that it takes a lot of courage to not be part of the status quo and how scary it must be for those who feel so deeply.

An early grasping of personality indicators by educators (a parent, teacher, physician, educational therapist) depends, of course, on the structure and level of the educator, on his ability to discern psychological factors, on his understanding of what the personality is, and on his ability to seize the various manifestations of the early phases of the development of personality. (Dabrowski, 1967, pp. 171-172)

Flight Recorder 261119PM: Phase 1: Discovery

As we chatted over lunch, I realized that much of my professional development as a teacher occurred through informal conversations, a place where ideas are casually worked through without the worry of how our contributions might be interpreted by a larger group. It would be impossible to count how many times I spent working out something that was not working in my classroom with a trusted colleague and learning from their perspective. I

wondered how it might make the afternoon of discovery different than it had been for the student group, given that there were only three of us and the comfortable conversations that had emerged over the course of the morning. I hoped that it would allow us to explore each of the stories more thoroughly with each co-researcher feeling heard, as well as in possession of additional resources that can come when we gain insight into the perspectives of others.

The discovery phase of the appreciative inquiry cycle highlighted the different approaches each teacher had in advocating for struggling students, the questions resonating differently with each of them.

Marcia. In sharing a time where she stood up for something she truly believed in, MG recounted a time when she had recognized and advocated for a student identified as twice exceptional (gifted and LD) who was not able to learn to read in the traditional way. She recalled “lots of frustration, behaviours [as he was] angry that he couldn’t do it.” She saw beyond the behaviors and persevered even when others could not see the potential in him. “Fast forward: he taught himself to read, scored the highest Gr. 6 PATs (provincial achievement tests), LD code removed, no behaviours. Anger was his way of telling us he needed help.” That she was able to recognize and seek out supports for him and others like him means her colleagues see her as someone who will “bend over backwards to do what needs to be done for kids,” making her feel appreciated and visible in her role as learning support teacher.

In sharing an experience that Marica regarded as memorable and challenged her in effectively working toward who she hoped to become as a teacher, she recounted the story of a student who would often leave class without permission. While he was assessed and identified with a severe language delay, she hadn’t fully grasped the depths of his struggles and would often send him back to class when she discovered him in the halls without exploring his reasons

for leaving further. When a suicide note surfaced, she felt a great deal of guilt and made a point of apologizing so he could understand she cared. Key to her finding her way through difficult times was understanding that even with good intentions, one can still make mistakes making her more vigilant in watching for signs and asking questions such as “Why was he escaping class?” Later, we came back to TPD at the beginning of the dream phase. When asked how viewing emotional responses through an appreciative lens would impact her interactions with others, Marcia felt this allowed her to be vulnerable with them: “I can respect their emotions as part of their journey and without judgement.” This had already been noted during the discovery phase in her apology to the student as well as her reflections on the experience:

The only remedy and preventive is to see clearly the child’s independent, differentiated personality, to see his singular type and his special sensitivity and irritability, to take into account his creative potentials and finally to adjust his behavior and the evaluation of him in relation to such characteristics. (Dabrowski, n.d., p. 63)

Terra. Terra felt that the TPD “has strengthened my resolve in the importance of how I already think/feel.” Her stories during the discovery phase revolved around her role in bringing a dedicated Montessori school to her school district, a journey that required risk-taking, confidence, and flexibility as she navigated the different stages of the process. When asked what it was that inspired her to act, she shared that “the passion was being sucked out of me.” Now working in the school, she helped bring to fruition, she shares that “it’s brought the light back into my life.” It was not an easy journey, and when reflecting on what the process offered her, she shared, “I know why I do what I do. The good things don’t come easy. The ones that live with you. You need to ask yourself, ‘What is this?’ and work your way through.” Reflecting on what has made her feel truly visible, understood, and appreciated for who she is, she recognized

the opportunities her role offers to be her true self with students. One experience she shared, that was particularly memorable and made her feel engaged and effectively becoming who she hoped to be as a teacher, involved a young student who was not able to go on a field trip. “He was inconsolable. I said, ‘My heart is sad for you,’ and he didn’t believe me and I told him to look at my face and he could see it. That changed everything because he knew I was legit sad.”

Reflecting on how the TPD might influence how she interacts with those who are struggling Terra shared that it would allow her to “acknowledge them and their emotional response for what it is-give my understanding and support (if needed/wanted).” She also indicated that she tries “to model this for others who see/hear the emotional response but are unsure of how to respond/interact” as part of a normalization process around how we perceive emotional responses.

Dabrowski (1967) suggests that “some degree of internal preparation must be possessed by everyone who takes up social work” but “that one should refashion himself before starting to work upon others does not appear right to us” (p. 22) in that becoming who we hope to be as individuals and teachers is a process.

Awareness of one’s imperfection, anxiety with respect to oneself, longing for an ideal, accompanied by a perception that one must work upon his own remolding, should go hand in hand with the work of raising the level of society. We can change and improve the group in which we live, therefore, only if we know how to develop ourselves.

Otherwise we vitiate the social work, it turns into a pseudo work, a cover for attitudes and aims which often have nothing to do with real social work. (p. 22)

The experiences shared by the teachers through the discovery process resonate with Dabrowski’s assertion that “proper interpretation of the content and development of inner

conflicts provides a basis for a gradual understanding and control of external conflicts” (1973, p. 70). He believed that these inner conflicts play a significant role in education, our interpersonal relations, and conflict. In commenting on what was required by a youth who had suffered a trauma, pain, or failure and was struggling with fitting in, he wrote about the importance of the individual to have a chance “rest, to put his experiences in order, to somehow synthesize them, and eventually, to adjust to the future difficulties of life; *but only after being pacified, soothed and saturated by the experiences of warmth which provide him with new ‘developmental resources’ [italics added]* (p. 72). It is this kind of response that “creates prophylactic conditions for future collisions with the external environment; it constitutes a ‘mental injection’ which immunizes against future difficulties” (p. 72).

In their concluding observations around the discovery process both Marcia and Terra began the process of dreaming by speculating how a new awareness of the role of emotions would impact the lives and learning within inclusive spaces. Both felt that this would lead to a different level of connection, where teachers and students would be “seeing each other, learning about each other” (Terra) and, perhaps more importantly, where you would see “students advocating for him/her self” (Marcia). On a personal level, they both believed they would be “meeting students where they are” with Terra adding this would include “trying to be aware, present, gauging interactions accordingly.”

It was easy to get lost in conversations as our group shared stories that were close to our hearts in the work that we do with children. Reflecting on what was shared during the first day of our appreciative inquiry summit, the teacher co-researchers discovered that the most compelling stories affirmed the importance of assertiveness and vulnerability: when they felt compelled to advocate for a students to the highest levels in the school district when needs were not being met

or when they recognized how, even with best intentions, mistakes are made and the importance of apologizing, explaining, and moving forward with new understanding.

For Marcia, the most life-giving moment of our interview process came from the recognition that “your foundation can be shaken at any time in ways you can’t imagine” and the golden idea that emerged was that suffering is a place that can lead to discovering what is positive, and how this can be supported. Terra’s life-giving moment was the affirmation she felt around “building connections with others-students, staff, parents.” For her, the golden idea revolved around students being at the heart of what we do and the need to “see them, acknowledge them, be vulnerable-share [our] emotions.”

Many insights stood out as we concluded the appreciative exploration of our own stories, experiences, and emotional responses through the lens of TPD. Terra saw life being dynamic, the importance of connections with the individual, and the need to be flexible. Marcia affirmed the importance of being child-centered, knowing who you are, and the ability to advocate for yourself and students. The first small step toward making positive change is “recognition that emotions are part of the journey” (Marcia); our experiences and reflections offered fertile ground for beginning the dreaming process on the second day of our inquiry.

Flight Recorder 111219AM: Phase 2: Dream

It was a few weeks before we were able to meet again. It had been a much quicker process to gather the teacher interview questions into shareable data sets making me wonder if I should have recorded our entire conversation over the course of that first day as it wove in and out through the process and other aspects of our lives. It made me consider how inseparable the research and learning process is from our daily experience yet at the same time provides a reprieve and lens from which to view our lives and experiences, something that we do not often

have the opportunity to do. While some aspects of the conversations may have offered us more data, focusing on the information that was retrieved from the interview sheets made me feel confident that I was including the pieces that had been selected and purposefully shared in a manner that respected aspects of our conversations that may not have been meant to be included.

As the second day approached, I was looking forward to meeting with Marcia and Terra again. I was curious about where the next steps of the process would take us and to hear how the theory and the process of appreciation may have continued to reverberate with them. I was also curious about where the dreaming phase would take us as I know that this work that I am doing in pursuing a doctorate was in large part inspired by a dream that perhaps the TPD could make a difference in the lives of students. Through the work on our first day, the stage had been set for the dream phase where “the imagination is engaged to envision what is possible once the best of our collective experiences and learning has been identified (Cooperrider, et al. 2008, p. 6). After reconnecting and reviewing the data drawn from our stories from that first day, we took on the foundational question, which allows one to imagine the best possible future without requiring them to account for the journey it took to get there.

Star Sighting: Focal Questions 1 and 2: Now that the entire school district has an understanding of TPD, what is happening differently in the schools, classrooms and gifted program? Marcia notices the quiet hallways, “because students are engaged and supported in the classroom with teachers and peers.” These classrooms contain “alternative work areas, bins, SI (sensory intervention) corner” as well as some form of exercise equipment for movement opportunities. Terra can tell that “teachers ‘see’ their students for who they are” and that there is “authenticity and understanding in relationships with teachers/students, teachers/teachers, teachers-admin and schools and central office.” Both Marcia and Terra see a greater variety of

students in the gifted program as “students are identified differently” (Marcia) and it has “expanded to encompass the many ways gifted students express themselves at all age levels” (Terra).

In reflecting on how the experiences and strengths they explored through the discovery phase informed this vision of the future, Terra drew from two key areas. The first was from the importance of connection and the experiences of fostering those connections in her school, the second came from the stories where teachers were able to see beyond what currently exists to what is possible and proceed with confidence and perseverance. Marcia identified relationships and forward thinking as important as well. This came from stories and experiences where “each child [was] seen as unique, valued and given space + time for the disintegration process” and the difference it made when they were “supported + respected by teachers” and “not viewed as pathology.”

As our trio began to consider what already existed within the district to facilitate this dream, Marcia recognized that there were individuals with the “ability to see beyond what is there” and who were “able to connect with a child with behaviors and recognize that behaviors are a form of communication.” Terra believed the Montessori model and its emphasis on relationships as human beings, and acknowledging the child/human, had much to offer the school district. She also saw gifted programming, the opportunity to participate in Destination Imagination® (Destination Imagination, 2018) and The Virtues Project™ (Kavelin-Popov, Popov, & Kavelin, 1997) where virtues are lived and modeled, as areas that could be built upon to move forward with this vision of the future. As they revisited the common themes between the stories, experiences and observations from the discovery phase, they were firm on what

principles would be key in creating a map to the future: relationships, trust and not making judgements and assumptions about what we think we are seeing.

A sensitive child, possessing rich personality indicators and protesting against the environment, may experience at the same time a certain, usually half-conscious, dissatisfaction with himself, the feeling of inferiority, and even the feeling of guilt. In the manifestations of contradictoriness and opposition he is simultaneously accentuating his individuality and independence. (Dabrowski, 1967, p. 175)

Does sensing that something lies beyond the contradictoriness, trusting that it could be an indicator of developmental potential have the power to change our response to it? That might depend on our relationship.

Flight Recorder 111219PM1: Phase 3: Design

After exploring the foundational questions, my curiosity kicked in again as we prepared to explore where the provocative propositions in the early part of the design phase would take us. Having experienced with the process with the students made me very excited to see where my teacher participants would go. Like the students, the teachers took this task very seriously, drawing on both the data and the dream to consider what was possible, and generate ideas containing the potential to disrupt, redirect, or reimagine how things are currently thought about or done. The first proposition reflected many aspects of the conversations that were shared, taking the best from what was shared to craft it into a positive image for the future (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 168).

A model school where teachers are problem solvers, demonstrate discernment, natural differentiators, authentic with students, do what is best for kids, flexible mindset/abilities, open to being vulnerable, curious, facilitator and guide, thinkers,

compassionate with respect for all viewpoints...committed... We discovered that this vision was grounded in our experiences in specialized programs like Montessori, Reading Recovery® and the gifted program, places where teachers had the opportunity to have a different kind of relationship with students. As we dug a little deeper into the idea of a model school where teachers were carefully selected on the basis of specific attributes, the provocative propositions began to evolve. The recognition that teachers are also in the process of becoming who they would like to be in the face of pressures coming from many directions with respect to curriculum, assessment and other initiatives the schools or district might be involved in was an important consideration. New propositions addressed some of the blueprints of how to get to or build toward that model school.

Autonomy of schools/teachers to address the needs of the community/students in individual ways. Flexible models where students have an opportunity to pursue passions meaningful to them. Terra's experience of bringing a Montessori school to fruition along with Marcia's experiences of highly successful individualized projects in helping students find and share their strengths helped ground these propositions. The themes identified earlier in the discovery phase, those of relationships and trust, are evident in this provocative proposition as they would have to extend to and from all levels of the organization. Trust between central office and school administrators. Trust between school administrators and teachers. Trust between teachers and students. The kind of trust that evolves from relationships. And what about those students for whom relationships are especially difficult, making classrooms, even those striving for inclusion, difficult? The third proposition was addressed to them.

Trauma school with trained teachers in Bruce Perry (Neurosequential Model in Education) or some unique approach for them. Learning support teachers are unique in that

they have the opportunity to work with teachers and students in many different classrooms, often following the student year to year, teacher to teacher. This unique perspective allows them to see what perhaps others do not or cannot observe. In exploring the basis to the third proposition, it was summed up as “Kids respond to teachers who have ‘it’.” What could this ‘it’ be? Coming back to the central themes in the discovery phase, perhaps beyond trust and relationships, the ability to avoid making assumptions and judgements? In a world where assumptions are often perceived as truth, this is possibly the most difficult theme to address.

Marcia and Terra chose different propositions to take to the design phase, perhaps with the recognition that we need to create spaces that will work for most students, but that there also needs to be spaces for those who struggle in those same spaces. They would not be alone in seeing this.

It is not just unrealistic, but conceptually impossible to think that everyone can be included in an organization or an interaction system. Instead, we are dealing with a complex, sophisticated and flexible system of inclusions and exclusions. (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018, p. 809)

Perhaps this is the struggle we have with the idea of inclusion, that we always look at it from the perspective that not being included in a particular space means that you are being excluded. But what if there was another place available to you, where you felt truly connected? And what if the boundaries between were porous so you could move easily between?

Terra, in exploring design features around the autonomy of schools/teachers to address the needs of the community/students in individualized ways (proposition 2) described what was needed at a personal level was to “be informed about the needs of students/community by asking, being interested.” As both an administrator and learning support teacher it meant “working with

staff to help them/free them to follow the children” always aware of the importance of modeling what you hope to see. “Providing opportunities within the school for students to pursue individual projects” was also important” recognizing the need to promote both students and staff in their learning. Through “normalizing that it’s okay to break free from the mold” and recognizing that “you don’t have to do what everyone else is doing” this could be further modeled at a district level through “being open to reflection, refinement” at that level.

Marcia’s experience with “students that are not successful in regular ed programs after accommodations have been tried and in place but are not working to move [the] child forward” had her focusing on the idea of a trauma school. This would be a place where psychologists and other professionals who are passionate about these kids would promote a “philosophy that is child-centered and embraces all students.” A growing awareness to the impact of childhood trauma had her recognize the importance of “trained, committed people to support children with trauma induced backgrounds to be successful in school and build trust and relationships with the people in the building.” The possibility of creating a model school that specifically addresses trauma has implications for how things could be done differently in many places.

Flight Recorder 111219PM2: Phase 4: Destiny

At the end of any research process, a question lingers: What now? What personally resonated with me as I explored appreciative inquiry as a means of engaging with my research participants was how the process was as important as anything that might occur as a result of the process. By releasing control of the outcome, destiny becomes something that finds its own ground within the hearts, minds, and actions of those who have engaged in the process. I shared with both research participants my commitments in disseminating the work that we completed together, with no expectation around if or how any of our provocative propositions would be

taken up. At the end of the day my heart was truly full. Filled by the shared stories and experiences of being teachers whose role is to support students who are struggling. Filled by the dreams of those who can imagine what is possible beyond what presently is. Filled with the generosity that allowed us to spend time together to shape destiny, in whatever form it might take.

Exit Slips. As with the students, prior to leaving on our second and final summit day, I asked each of the teacher co-researchers for a final exit slip asking for one thing about the process we went through, the stories that we shared, or something they learned about the theory that would remain after we parted. As with the students, their response left me hopeful that the process had been valuable:

- Really enjoyed the process. The theory of positive disintegration really resonated personally and professionally. It really affirmed my approach in my interactions with students. It has also helped guide me in how I might approach supporting my colleagues in understanding students.” (Terra)
- As a teacher: to respect children’s disintegrations-give time, space, provide encouragement and support (not fix) the process. Me: be the best me I can be: live by example. (Marcia).

With these exit slips, my second day with the teacher co-researchers was complete and again destiny was left to the unfolding of the universe, which over the weeks and months to come would shape my own future as well as that of our schools, community, country and world in unexpected ways. Living by example in times of relative stability is one thing. Living by example when your world, and the world as you know it rapidly changes from what you knew to something yet to be determined is another.

The uncertainty principle, however, reveals that macroscopic averaging obscures a wealth of microscopic activity. As we will see shortly, this frenzy is the obstacle to merging general relativity and quantum mechanics. (Greene, 1999, p. 120).

Would this global disintegration cause us as individuals and larger organizations to reflect on our most firmly held beliefs and question whether they serve who it is we aspire to become? And what role will individual freedom and control be allowed to play as this future is determined?

Chapter 6: Positively Disintegrating: Unexpected Data

The process of positive disintegration also shapes the “dramatic attitude toward life.” Life becomes “thought” experienced and not instinctive. On the stage, in art, and in one’s own life, the problems of life, death, love, creativity, and development come to the foreground. . . the individual is conscious of the entire drama of life. He is actor and stage manager in the internal and external play of changes, disappointments and developments. (Dabrowski, 1967, p. 166).

The Disintegration

On August 15, 2019, the world as I had known it disintegrated when my husband was diagnosed with glioblastoma, a stage 4 brain tumour with a dismal prognosis. As we scrambled to figure out what this new reality meant, everything that had felt solid—jobs, careers, family, lifestyle, relationships—suddenly shifted. Before I could even begin to absorb the implications, we were in the hospital, surrounded by others whose lives had been turned upside down by accidents, heart attacks, congenital abnormalities, and cancer. I was suddenly immersed in a world that I thought healthy eating, strong genetics, and good habits had inoculated me from. Regrets, worries, even the kindnesses towards us all became excruciating in ways that are impossible to describe. And with each new specialist we encountered we found only more questions that came with vague answers, as we endeavoured to understand what the implications were for our family.

At first it felt like cruel irony, going through a full-blown life-altering disintegration in the midst of working through the theory with my research participants. It felt like there was some perverse god or universal karmic force that decided I had no right to conduct this kind of research without experiencing a certain level of suffering myself. As I toyed with whether I

should continue, my overactive imagination wondered if this was a bizarre trial, from a hero's journey, to test whether or not I was committed to the task, keeping me from discovering an important truth. And then there was the painful thought that perhaps I had caused this by adding more responsibility, and with it stress, to my husband as I pursued my doctorate. As more and more of my life and choices came under scrutiny, I began to fear my own thoughts, where they would take me, what they would ask me to consider.

*I know you want to walk with me
 You think maybe you've got something to offer
 But I never caught your name
 And you sound like you're the voice of reason
 Been around, well-seasoned
 Convincing me that there are rules and a game*

*And I admit I like to hedge my bets
 When I can't see what's coming yet
 To convince myself I'm winning either way
 But I wish that you would just come clean
 Tell me who you are and what you need
 And for God's sake, just say your name*

I tried to find hope in things like string theory. If all matter was made up of vibrating strings, then perhaps we just needed to change the vibrations that had come together as a tumour in Mark's brain. I was a songwriter; I could write a song... And if ManyWorlds theory has traction, how do we add amplitude to the universe in which Mark survives this tumour... I was in a band. I had sound equipment. At night before I went to sleep, I would close my eyes and try to lucid dream my way into an alternate universe where I could meet the tumour and try to tame it. I shared my thoughts with my mentor and colleague of Dabrowski, Paul McGaffey, and he wrote

this back: “The tumour is not the enemy. Fear is the enemy.” (McGaffey, P., September 2019, personal communication.)

*Lately you've been everywhere
The only friend with time to spare for a weary soul
Whose world's turned upside down
Sometimes it's just a turn of phrase
Or maybe seeing your shadow on another face
That tells me that you like to get around*

*And I admit it's hard to feel alone
When there's still so much that is unknown
But your presence hasn't helped that go way
So why don't you just come clean
Tell me who you are and what you need
And for Christ's sake, just say your name*

Fear courted me in the guise of many things. It took a while to understand the impact it was having on my thought processes, something I tried to immobilize with mindless games on my phone when I was not “handling” what needed to be handled. Over time, as I worked to help our family adjust to our new reality, it would hijack me with panic attacks and other stress responses. Hardest of all was seeing it stalk those close to me and not always knowing how to help them corral it and keep it from stealing precious moments and joy from them.

*And I admit I let you whisper in my ear
Took you under the covers where you fed my tears
I let you see me naked, I let you interfere
Tell me what it will take to know that you're not wanted here*

Over time, I began to learn its ways and recognize that the only way to control it was by summoning courage. Some days this was easier than others. When I was able to turn again to my

studies, I began to consider whether how I was coming to know intimately through my own disintegrative process might influence the research I was doing. That objective part of me worried that perhaps this would somehow change the process and wondered about the ethical implications. But here it is... life happens, and we cannot ignore it or shut it off. In as much as this disintegration is happening while I am working on my PhD, every day, students and teachers come to school, many with their own disintegrations, whether it be divorce, moving, loss, not fitting in... and they walk among us in our classrooms, suffering, behaving, and trying to learn. And alongside, dogging their steps and infiltrating their interactions... fear.

*I know you want to walk with me
 You think maybe you've got something to offer
 But I never caught your name
 So why don't you just come clean
 Tell me who you are and what you need
 And for Christ's sake, just say your name*

When Mark first got the glioblastoma diagnosis, the doctors gave us their best mathematical conception of what a diagnosis like this meant. Life expectancy was shared as a median. 50% die before 15 months are up, 50% die after 15 months. Age, general health, positive attitude and support all seemed to factor in for a better outcome, but in the grand scheme of things, there was very little they could tell us beyond that. Of those who beat the magic 15-month mark, the survival rate past five years is less than 5%. As we ventured into the new world of healthcare and cancer treatment, we breathed in optimism. Mark was relatively young, only 56 and in great health. From nurses to anesthesiologists, the response was surprise when they learned that the tumour was the only health issue Mark had. His attitude from day one was amazing, curious to learn everything he could about it, committed to doing everything he could

to stop it, and determined not to let the worst-case scenario dominate his thoughts. He sailed through surgery, recovered quickly, and was able to help manage the last few weeks of yard work and home repairs before we had to return to the city for the next phase of treatment. In Edmonton, he navigated a month of chemotherapy and radiation with very few side effects, eating well, exercising and meditating every day. We had a month of rest after returning home before beginning the new round of chemo in early December. Three and a half months after surgery, much earlier than the six-to-nine-month post-surgery time frame for recurrence I found during my internet research, we were told that the tumour was back in several spots and growing. Despite everything the doctors had shared with us over the previous months about the nature of glioblastoma, I could not help but feel cheated once again.

Quantum physics is a new model of reality that gives us a picture of the universe. It is a picture in which many concepts fundamental to our intuitive understanding of reality no longer have meaning. (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010, p. 68)

This time the panic attack came in the middle of the night and wrenched me awake. As I struggled to find my meditative breath and slow my racing heart, my mind leapt from place to place trying to find a safe place to land while feeling utterly alone. I am not sure where it came from or when it arrived, but the realization came to me that *this* was not new and I was not the only one who had found myself in *this* place, and that I should not be afraid. . . because, in as much as life makes no promises about longevity, from the day we are born, death is inevitable, and as such, is as sacred a passage as any that came before. Two lines from Wendell Berry's (2001) poem, *How to Be a Poet*, appeared in my consciousness: "There are no unsacred places, only sacred places and desecrated spaces." (p. 270). And suddenly, I had the awareness that I was in fact not alone—Mark and the girls were here in this space with me—and it was my solemn

responsibility to keep it sacred for all of us. With this sense of purpose, I began the process of summoning the virtues I would need to navigate this new place we were coming to know. The first to appear was grace. “With grace, we can turn every communication and relationship into a thing of beauty” (Virtue Cards, 2020.)

*We don't know how much time we have
I fear that light is fading now
So let's keep this sacred...
Fear will tempt me from this path
to steal the light that we still have
Unless we keep this sacred...
And silence like a siren call
Beckons me to recall
Every nuance of this space
While it still holds your light in place*

*We don't know how much time we have
I fear that light is fading now
Let's keep this sacred
The beauty of your smiling eyes
The warmth of your hand in mine
Let's keep this sacred
And every dream that bound us tight
Will carry us into the night
Nothing's lost that is remembered
While love remains to fuel the embers...*

And so, we took daily walks through the park nearby and reminded ourselves how beautiful our small part of the world is. We celebrated Christmas with friends and family and ate our favourite foods and bought the girls exactly what they wanted and needed. We wrote lists of

things we wanted to get done around the house and discussed little decisions, like what kind of tree we would plant in the yard next summer and which colour to paint our new front door.

Every morning, we had tea together in the soft light of our living room and every night I gave him a massage before we drifted off to sleep. Two months later, six months to the day from his diagnosis, Mark died in my arms.

Autopsychotherapy

Eternity itself may forever lie beyond the reach of our equations, but our analyses have already revealed that the universe we have come to know is transitory. From planets to stars, solar systems to galaxies, black holes to nebula, nothing is everlasting. Indeed, as far as we can tell, not only is each individual life finite, but so too is life itself. (Greene, 2020, p. 5.)

In the weeks that follow Mark's death, space and time are no longer coherent, the mind that I have counted on all these years to find clarity wanders in random, often cruel patterns until the only thing that I feel I can trust is the grief. I am able to hover above it at a functional level: go for walks with friends, help out with planning an annual event and even buy a puppy. But beneath the platitudes, obligations, and expressions of hope, my entire body embraces the grief so I can continue to feel the brokenness of my heart, the effort of each breath, and the track of each tear in hopes that somehow, through this, Mark never leaves me. I want to suffer because I fear if I do not, everything we shared will have meant nothing, and that thought is unbearable.

Still here on earth we have punctuated our moment with astonishing feats of insight, creativity, and ingenuity as each generation has built on the achievements of those who have gone before, seeking clarity on how it all came to be, pursuing coherence in where it is all going, and longing for an answer to why it all matters. (Greene, 2020, p. 5)

“It’s so cool you’re doing your PhD,” I hear his voice whisper to me as I am lying in bed, trying to find the energy to start another day. “What’s so cool about it?” I ask the darkness, praying that he will answer and that all of this has just been a terrible nightmare. But it is a memory I am hearing, speaking so clearly that it is almost as if he is in the room. In fact, I cannot remember how many times he would say those very words. “What’s so cool about it Mark?” I ask again, and as my mind searches for the answer to the question, I can remember how amazed he was at how I could just sit down at a computer and write. Writing had never come easy to him as he always thought in images and so he was impressed at what I could write in what appeared to him an effortless manner. But he was able to see where the plants should go in the garden, how to renovate a house, and what needed to be done to keep our lives orderly while I composed songs and papers to manage the chaos in my head. “What’s so cool about it Mark?” I ask again and I remember how I would read him short snippets from my writing, and he would be surprised at how I pulled it all together: the songs, the quotes, the stories, some of them reflections of our own conversations. His synergistic marvels were in figuring out how to write apps and use technologies to simplify our finances or scoring programs for projects we volunteered for together, making it possible for us to do/offer so much. “What’s so cool about it Mark?” I ask again and I remember him talking about the opportunities it might give me, whether travelling to exotic locations like Poland to present at a conference, or job opportunities that might become available with a PhD. He was never career-oriented, he supported me in innumerable ways, from making my lunches in our early years of marriage, to being the stay-at-home Dad at different times in our life, to helping out in whatever way he could when my workload got heavy. **“What’s so cool about it Mark if you’re not here to be a part of it**

all?!?!” I scream out. Because it is now that everything that was intangible has become painfully evident in its absence. This was never my PhD, it was ours.

It is perspective... that becomes all the more palpable when we immerse ourselves in the full expanse of time—beginning to end—a cosmological backdrop that provides unmatched clarity on how singular and fleeting the here and now actually is. (Greene, 2020, p. 15).

“So get on with it...” I am sitting on the couch, staring at the candle that I light every morning for him when I think I hear him. I look up, imagining him sitting in his favorite chair across from me, drinking his tea, checking out the stock market on his phone. I have been procrastinating, and I am not sure if it is him or me trying to kickstart the day. It has been more than a month since he passed, the world has been shut down by the coronavirus, I am waiting for the call from human resources at my school district to hear whether the gifted program will continue next year, doubtful with all the new budget cuts from the UCP government. Nothing feels solid and none of the efforts that I have made to bargain with the universe have been able to reverse the reality that the girls and I find ourselves now living in. Some days, all I can think about was the sadness I could see on his face when he did not know I was looking. The sadness that he worked so hard to keep from permeating our lives those last weeks and days of his life. The sadness that the time had been so fleeting. The sadness he would not let me help carry... until now. So get on with what?

What is this now?

This thing I thought that I could hold forever and now I'm not sure how

Who am I now?

Someone I was certain could go the distance and now I don't know how

If there's a God and this is a test I have to say that I'm not amused

*I know there were no promises but now I'm just confused
How the most beautiful thing I've ever known
Could just slip away...*

People tell you that the one you love is always with you and that you can feel the presence of the one you lost long after they are gone. That love transcends death. Even Dabrowski when outlining his levels speaks of how at Level 5 suggests that at this level “the individual experiences and realizes eternal relationships” (Dabrowski, 1996, p. 115). Is this his Catholicism coming through? I get that I will continue to feel Mark’s presence, even his love as many of the foundations that we put in place for our life together continue to support both myself and the girls. I also understand that as I move forward, Mark is with me in the person I have become because he was part of my life, perhaps even more so as I endeavour to keep him alive in practising some of the little things that he did, noticing the details that he took care of and realizing they are now my responsibilities. But this is small comfort for the loss of the energy he brought into our home through his simple physical presence.

At Level 4 Dabrowski (1996) tells us that “emotional ties are more deeply than ever before understood as unique and unrepeatable” (p. 115). This fills me with so much pain. I know this now, but did I know it a year ago? Mark and I used to joke about how grateful we were to have found someone who could put up with our idiosyncrasies and how it would be impossible and quite frankly not worth the effort to have to go through that process again. As much as I grieve the loss of him, I also grieve knowing that no one will ever understand me the way he did. We bore witness to one another’s challenges, gently smoothed each other’s rough edges and ultimately adjusted so we could not only fit but grow together. In my mind, there is this image from my garden, two carrots growing side by side but beneath the surface, the carrots have wound themselves around one another in beautiful curves. Nothing you could ever sell in a

grocery store, but when you find it in your garden, you feel compelled to show someone how amazing this anomaly is. We were I guess an emergent Level 3, with “an attitude of maladjustment to commonly accepted categories in the conception of love and friendship” (p. 115) and for the most part, we were comfortable with that. Every once in a while, my temper flared when I felt that we might be missing out on some of the experiences that other couples appeared to share but these were always short lived with a reconnection to our foundational pieces about what we believed about each other and our lives together and who that meant we were as a result. *This* is what we had and my regret is that I didn’t thank him for it every single day because every day, in unexpected, sometimes tiny, sometimes enormous ways, I feel the dark vacuum his death has created, and surrender to it.

Integration

Contemplation is the stage of development at which a man passes from superficial judgments, from the attitude of consent, to conscious feelings and to a working out of the principles of one’s actions. It then implies a passage from sensual to mental life, from external to internal experiences, from reactive emotional life to deepened emotional life coupled with the intellect, and from unrelated experiences to integrated experiences.

(Dabrowski, 1967, p. 32)

As I occasionally surface from the darkness that is the enormous black hole the loss of Mark has created, I grasp out for lifelines, something to help me sense meaning from it. At first, this feels distasteful, like I am mining a tragedy to exploit it for purposes that I do not want to assume or pass off as altruistic or courageous. Most of the songs that I am writing feel like clichés that cannot begin to scratch the surface of what we shared or what this journey has been. I worry about chronicling the disintegration as a chapter in this thesis, that I have editorialized it

in ways that would make it into just another story with heroes and villains and bizarre plot twists. But as I forge on through the doubts and just allow my fingers to follow pathways on the keyboard, I feel a loosening inside of me. The sorrow has a place to go, the dreams have room to breathe, the fears have been found to be like the emperor, without clothes, naked without their cloak of pathology. This dissertation is the merging of life, art and academia, and as an appreciative inquirer myself, what can I take from this journey that will somehow add to our collective knowledge about the Theory of Positive Disintegration and how it relates to inclusion?

Greene (2020) writes “it may be that entropy and evolution are well-matched partners in the trek toward the emergence of life” (p. 7). Perhaps we are simply architects fashioning structures around the inevitable black holes that will eventually consume us, as “through our creative capacities we have developed formidable defenses against what would otherwise have been debilitating disquiet” (p. 10). Never in my life have I felt so vulnerable. I keep telling those who say they are praying for me to let God know that I have had enough tests for a while. In the midst of a pandemic, there are other ‘rocks’ in my life that now feel like they too could be lost to me. Jardine, McCaffrey, and Gilham (2014), in exploring suffering through the lens of Buddhism and hermeneutics, suggest that one of the “key locales” for suffering “is the fear of one’s own impermanence and the impermanence of the world” and that we look “for the cure of suffering within the very falsehoods and forgetfulness that keep it in place” (p. 6). While I am grateful for the prayers, Mark is still gone, despite them, and I am left struggling to breathe in this black hole in which I find myself immersed. A little voice in my head tells me to pay attention. This is data. You aren’t philosophically or metaphorically theorizing about disintegration. You are here. In the middle of the blackest hole you have ever known. What are you seeing and feeling?

Mixed in with all the fear, frustration, anger, sorrow, disbelief, and so many other emotions, there is an unbelievable love that was/is perfect in its imperfection. And what was this love for? Was it for Mark and the life that we had? Yes, but it is more than that. It is for this fleeting moment in time that we have had to experience it all. I remember having this image as I was looking in the mirror just days before Mark's surgery to remove the tumour. I saw myself placing an order at the kiosk advertising the opportunity to experience life as a physical being on a tiny blue dot in a distant universe. The kiosk advertised it as a "Quick Ride in an Alternative Universe" so when the one taking my order asked me what kind of experience I wanted and I recklessly responded, "Give me the works!" Now on this small blue planet where time moves at a different pace, as I worried about Mark's impending brain surgery, I gazed into the mirror as deeply as I could into the reflection of my own eyes and wondered "What the f*** were you thinking?!?! Really? The works?!?! This is 'the works' you idiot!!"

A full life is the works. How much time and energy do we expend protecting and insulating ourselves from experiencing pain or even contemplating the inevitable? Dabrowski (1967) tells us that "suffering, if we experience it correctly, makes us sensitive to the suffering of others, awakens in us a new awareness, and creates a breach in our excessively egocentric attitude toward the surrounding world" (p. 31). What does it mean to experience suffering correctly? Feminist Sara Ahmed (2015) warns that "the means by which emotions flow or are blocked take us back to the fundamental social and political questions about how spaces are organized around certain bodies" and that "if certain bodies come first, then their happiness comes first" (p. 225). Does this apply to suffering as well? My suffering cannot be the litmus paper by which I measure or legitimize the suffering of others. Yet perhaps through this disintegration, through my suffering, perhaps I can find a way to reorient myself to who I am

within the sacred spaces that define the fleeting existence of this tiny blue dot. Paulo Freire (1992) in *Pedagogy of Hope* tells us that “at the bottom, in seeking the deepest ‘why’ of my pain, I was educating my hope” (p. 22).

Perhaps as my hope gains firmer ground, I will know better how to enable the cultivation of hope in those who have suffered, whatever the source. Perhaps through my new, intimate acquaintance with fear, I will be better able to know when it has entered that same space, attempting to draw us away from the sacred task of drawing strength from our vulnerabilities. For beneath the crumbling foundation of what I thought was my life, it was love, commitment, and loyalty that made me this vulnerable. These are what have created this pain of loss and even in the darkest moments, I do not want to hide from the rawness of the vulnerability I now feel, because it is this that also gives me strength. I only need to embrace my daughters to remember. As fear pummels me with regret, it is humility that allows me to see the beauty in the imperfection, knowing that as we all fumble toward becoming who it is we wish to be, this is the very best that we can offer; beautiful, imperfect, love.

For the next two days I am so buoyed by this thought that I share it with friends... regret, humility, beautiful, imperfect, love lighting my way through this darkness. We celebrate Mark’s birthday without him. In the morning, I send a recording of the song I wrote for him as a birthday gift to family and friends hoping it has something to offer them in his memory. My daughter spends the afternoon creating the perfect cupcake in honour of this special day and for supper, we enjoy some of his favorite food on the beautiful china plates that were his great grandmother’s. Before bed, I watch an action movie and imagine he is beside me. Sorrow lurks at every turn, but it is to be expected and we greet it without protest. The next morning I am able to work on my dissertation and for the first time in weeks, I feel a solid connection to the work.

Dabrowski is leaping at me from the pages of his books, pointing me in new directions for new considerations and my brain feels active, like the fog has lifted. “My synapses are snapping again,” I share confidently on an afternoon walk with a friend. But by evening, I can feel it in my chest, hard to describe, just an unsettling feeling, a nameless emotion, exerting pressure. I try to distract myself with another movie, but I cannot find anything Mark would like or has not seen already so I go to bed early, hoping it will offer me an early start on the next day.

For the first time in years, I have a nightmare. I am walking through a barren, snow covered forest with someone, I think it may be one of my sisters, when we hear a sound. To my left, barely hidden behind a tree is the largest wolf I have ever seen. It is skeletal and mangy and clearly stalking me. I tell my sister that if we make ourselves as big as possible and scream at it fiercely, it will go away. I try this, but it will not go away. When I turn back to find my sister, she is gone and I see a second wolf, just as skeletal and mangy as the first, also stalking me. Something about the forest is familiar and I think to myself that if I scream as loud as possible from the depths of my being I will not only scare the wolves, but perhaps alert my brother whose forest I think this might be. I summon every ounce of energy I have to scream but there is nothing but a feeble squawk. I try again. Nothing. The wolves draw closer and I begin to imagine their teeth tearing at my throat and wonder if it will be quick. As the first leaps, all teeth and foul breath, I wake, and I can feel it. A darkness has descended. Even though I have forgiven/accepted/celebrated the beautiful imperfection that was/is our love, he’s still not coming home and no one will ever replace him.

*I keep listening for the sound of your car in the driveway
And the scraping of that old gate
Hearing the back door open and you shaking off your work boots
Knowing your gentle touch isn't far away*

*Oh won't you come home, it's been a long day
 And I'm weary to the bone
 It's the touch of your hand and the sweetness of your voice
 That keeps me from feeling alone
 In this big world
 At night I listen for your breath as you sleep quietly beside me
 And promise I won't care if you snore
 'Cause my dreams have made me restless and I'm worried about tomorrow
 But if I hear you I won't worry anymore
 Oh, won't you come home, it's been a long day
 And I'm weary to the bone
 It's the touch of your hand and the sweetness of your voice
 That keeps me from feeling alone*

*In this big world all you got is who you love
 And who you love is what makes it all worthwhile
 And I'd give up everything that never mattered in the end
 And all that would be left is your smile...*

*Oh won't you come home, it's been a long day
 And I'm weary to the bone
 It's the touch of your hand and the sweetness of your voice
 That keeps me from feeling alone
 It's the touch of your hand and the sweetness of your voice
 That keeps me from feeling alone
 In this big world...*

For one day and then two, I am afraid to look into this new darkness, where the heavy weight in my chest stands in direct contradiction with the utter weightlessness of my life, which now feels as though it is floating, untethered in vast vacuous space. Tears flow unrepentantly, trying to release some of this heaviness but to no avail. My chest aches and the darkness beckons

and I struggle to breathe, despite breath imposing itself on me making me feel violated by life and the way it forces me to go on without Mark.

Subject/Object Orientation

“Get out of bed and get to work.” The voice is familiar, and at first I think it might be Mark talking to me through whatever it is that now separates us. Everyone tells me that he is still with me, which often pisses me off because he is not, not in the way that their loved ones still are. But then I remember that they mean well, as they work to build their own insulation from the inevitable losses that lie ahead. I can forgive them. I have done the same. *“Stop procrastinating. You can carry all this pain if you want, but you have to keep moving.”* I remember this voice from long ago, another disintegration, sternly pulling me out of a downward spiral. It is a voice I trust even though at the time, when I first heard it, I believed I was experiencing a psychotic break until I realized that it was there to help. *“You’re back.”* I feel as though I am greeting an old friend who appears to have grown gentler over the years as the tone in her voice appears to indicate. *“I never left.”* I have to think about it before realizing that though we haven’t always been in direct, pointed conversations, there have been these little asides, nudges, and reality checks that often come out of nowhere. *“That was me.”* I can almost see her smile in her voice and I wish that I could hug her. *“I don’t think I can do this without you.”* And the tears flow again. *“I know. It’s going to be brutal, but we’ve got this.”* We turn to face this new darkness.

Self-observation and the experience of oneself are the prerequisites of seeing others in their individuality and existential aloneness. Gaining in distance and objectivity towards oneself allow one to perceive the unique subjectivity of others. This process eventually becomes a source of motivation in development and is therefore called the dynamism ‘subject-object in oneself’. It leads to a need of transforming oneself, of gaining more

control and self-determination. It develops a deeper understanding of others. (Dabrowski, 1972, p.125).

It hits me like a tidal wave, bowling me over until I am gasping for breath. It is familiar, yet unfamiliar, it is fierce, yet gentle, it is utter despair, with only tiny filaments of hope. As wave after wave washes over me, there is a growing awareness that this pain and loss I am feeling now is not just my own. I can suddenly feel all the heartache that was Mark's. Everything that he hid behind his daily health regimens and unfettered optimism. Everything that he protected me from, especially during those last months of his life. The extraordinary loss of a treasured life that has been cut short. It is so unbelievably painful that I do not know how it will ever be possible to emerge from this. *"Slow it down."* I am confused but as soon as she says it, I am able to do it. *"Just a little at a time."* Another wave hits me and then recedes. I take a deep breath. *"Why couldn't I feel this before?"* It is agony to think that he bore this alone, and I am angry with myself that I could not somehow have done more. *"I wouldn't let you."* Now, I am furious at the interference. How dare she interfere and leave Mark to carry all that on his own? *"You were helping him carry it by carrying him."* All those months of researching cures, alternative diets, long walks, organization of the finances, making lists and simplifying our life... *"I was carrying him?"* I feel a surge of love because I know he would have carried me because that is what we did, we carried each other through so many things. And then the loss hits me again. He is not here to carry me anymore. My chest tightens. *"He's still carrying you."* I want to argue, but I know it is true. So many things are still happening because he set them up that way. The bills are getting paid and little jobs are getting done because he set it up that way. Last night, I even found a box of doorknobs and keys in the garage neatly arranged, as if he knew I was going to have to replace the one on the backdoor. *"It won't last forever but it will buy you*

some time.” I want to ask her why I need to buy time, but I already know the answer. If he cannot carry me forever, then I have to be ready for when I truly am on my own path again.

“Don’t forget the girls.” I smile and my chest loosens just a little.

Authenticism

The recognition of suffering often relapses into hiddenness under regimes of cure. The basic difficulty in, for example, coming to learn to read, is masked or disguised by the promises of reading programs designed to make it easy, as if its basic suffering is not actual basic but just an error that can be eradicated through technical means. The basic suffering still appears, but now only “in disguise” and the guise is not seen through and we become entranced by the guise and caught in false promises of various “cover ups.” We then find ourselves suffering the ever-accelerating rush to find the right disguise to put our minds at ease. Wheeling. (Jardine, McCaffrey & Gillam, 2014, pp. 9-10)

Before Mark passed away, not long after the diagnosis, my brain began the process of imagining worst case scenarios and how I would get by. It would draw to my attention all the limitations that our relationship had placed on how I lived my life and suggest that there would be many more possibilities available to me. It would tally our resources and suggest as sole decision maker that there were things that I would be able to do with the girls that had not really been an option before. As diets, treatments, and medications got more involved and complicated, it would tell me how nice things would be when life returned to normal. It even allowed platitudes to escape my lips, things like “life makes no guarantees” and “we’ve been lucky in so many ways.” In as much as it tried to redirect me, or offer me some kind comfort, it only made the disquiet in my already spinning mind worse as its fleeting distraction and aimless wanderings only served to make me feel dehumanized and unworthy. I was angry. Why would my brain do

this to me? What did it mean about who I was as a person? Now months later, as I attempt to figure out how life will continue to unfold, the very actions of getting back to normal, sorting out finances and considering how to bring joy back to our lives carries the additional pain of those initial attempts to protect myself. I see posts about grief on Facebook and I am enraged at the comfort that the poster is attempting to impart on this platform. That somehow sharing a platitude will somehow make the “griever” that may be out there feel better. And then it dawns on me. This is not for me, this is for them, their own disguise and vain attempt to protect themselves. Perhaps the teacher finding a reading program to make learning easy for the student, is protecting themselves from the inherent difficulty of what it means to be a teacher, suffering alongside your student. All of us protecting ourselves from what?

I have been shoveling a lot of snow. Aside from addressing the moisture concerns that Mark impressed on me with respect to the foundation of our house, it feels productive and gives me a tiny sense of control, a kind of f*** you to the winter that will not just go away nicely. When I am out there shoveling, I have a sense that I am communicating to my neighbours and the weather gods that I can handle this. My sister and I chat over the phone about the landscaping that will need to be done this spring after the scheduled sewer line replacement occurs and I start thinking about finding the right contractor to do the job. I decide to find an accountant to help me sort through the books and make an appointment with a financial planner. I feel responsible. I am making decisions. Life is moving forward. Toward what?

I wake up and I want to rip my heart out of my body. It aches and feels so fickle to the point that it does not feel like it's mine and if it is then I do not want it. Sometimes I can get

through several days at a time “doing” everything to give the appearance that I am moving on only to be woken to the feeling that I have executed the worst form of betrayal humanly possible: imagining a life without him. Nothing feels authentic, neither who I was or who I might become without him. It is not just my heart that is broken, I am broken. As I frantically search for something that was real, I am taken back to an evening in the hospital, where Mark cannot speak coherently or walk on his own. We had arrived at the hospital 24 hours earlier via ambulance when we could not control one of Mark’s headaches and the nurse is telling me that the hydrating IV Mark needs will have to wait until morning. A different nurse that I had spoken to six hours earlier had forgotten to request it. I had only asked that nurse because the ER nurse had told me it would be addressed once we were formally admitted. In the ER they did not want to give him the IV until they had a better idea of what was happening in his brain. We were in the ER because the paramedics could not find a vein to give him the painkillers that could have stopped the pain because he was so dehydrated. The paramedics hadn’t arrived until the palliative care nurse and I had exhausted all treatment options that we had over the course of a day when the headache grew gradually worse during which time Mark was able to drink very little. This was the third severe headache episode since the recurrence of the tumour and each time they occurred there was less space between them. And so when she tells me that it will have to wait until morning, in front of Mark and my daughters, I lose it. Within half an hour, Mark has his IV and by morning, he is once again coherent and knows who I am.

I am not proud of this story. In retrospect, I wish that I had been able to handle things differently along the way as I recognize that I was the only one who knew the whole story, who had all the pieces. If only I had followed up more carefully when we first got to our room. If only I had been more persistent in the ER as we waited for a room. If only I had called the ambulance

before the headache got completely out of control. If only I had given a bigger dose of medication right when the headache began. If only I had never [...] maybe he would not have gotten the tumour. Now that he is gone, I am the one left to caretake our story: the beautiful moments, the accomplishments, the disappointments, the painful parts, and the unfinished threads and from all of that, try to fashion a next chapter or new story. How does one do that when the only thing that feels real is that moment in the hospital when I lost my temper? The moment that I realized all the rules I followed, all the control that I left in the hands of others, had left Mark so distorted that no one could see beyond who he was as a result of all he had been through in the previous 36 hours. And that as a result of losing it, I got Mark back, if only for a few short weeks. My mind leaps...how does one go about directing a cataclysmic temper tantrum at the universe?

We do not consider authentic such forms of behavior, conduct, experiencing or thinking which may find expression in the so-called sincerity and straightforwardness without inhibition, in uncontrolled manifestations of one's inborn inclinations, in "being natural" without reflection and inner psychic transformation. It seems that such an interpretation of authenticism would simplify the issue and would not take into consideration the role of levels in the development of a human being. It seems that sincerity and straightforwardness have real value if they result from many conscious and elaborated inhibitions. (Dabrowski, 1973, p. 91).

Over time I have become aware of how much those close to me need me to unburden them from this pain that has become a constant in my life. It is a difficult task to figure out how to be in this world that has been forever changed by the loss of Mark and all that he meant in our lives and continue on knowing that for others daily life for the most part has been unchanged by

that loss. There is also a strange dynamic of feeling scrutinized over whether I am responding appropriately to this loss as well as an expectation that I get on with my life. I sense that my daughters struggle with this as well and are watching my lead. I determine that I must make peace with sorrow; that I must find a way to acknowledge its presence as I move forward, and let it companion me from here on in, recognizing that ours too will be an intimate relationship and as unique as the relationship I had with Mark. So, in the same way that I would find my way to my basement office/studio to wait for the song to appear that would write me back in love with Mark after a disagreement, I wait for sorrow's song. It does not take long.

*And I am learning how to skim the surface
 How not to trouble the depths below
 Oh I can feel them, tugging at my rudder
 Waiting for that moment, when I'm too tired to row
 And there's no bridge across this ocean
 Only currents of emotion
 Carrying me to where I didn't want to go
 He was the compass and the sail,
 He caught the breezes, tamed the gales
 Now all I've got is this boat that I row...*

*Oh I am learning, how to skim the surface
 How not to trouble the depths below
 Oh I can feel them, swelling there beneath me
 Like they're waiting for me, to just let go
 And there's no bridge to cross this ocean
 Only currents of emotion
 Carrying me to where I still have to go
 Now you're the compass and the sail,
 You'll catch the breezes, tame the gales
 'Cause all I've got is this boat that I row...*

*He was the compass and the sail,
 He caught the breezes, tamed the gales
 Now all I've got is this boat that I row...
 Oh I am learning, how to skim the surface
 How not to trouble the depths below*

Jardine (2015) writes that there is “a joy to be had in the turning toward suffering and letting it be what it is...because that practice, when it is properly practiced, can change the nature of that suffering and our relation to it” (p. 231). By this he does not imply that we inflict suffering on ourselves or others for our edification, but that we recognize suffering is a part of life, that cannot and should not be avoided for bound to it is compassion. Making peace with sorrow is not about wearing it like a cloak, carrying it as a shield or wielding it like a sword, but rather about leaving spaces in my life where and when I can fully immerse myself in the pain of loss that is an inherent aspect of the gift of life. In return, I must allow sorrow, and the compassion which is a part of it, help guide me forward.

Transcendence

Recognition and elaboration of the phenomenon of transcendence of the biological life cycle raises hopes of a great existential and essentialist power. It can become a stimulus for self-education; it can become one of the basic aims of education; it may enliven creativity in poetry, drama and plastic arts. (Dabrowski, 1973, p. 135)

Compassion is a little more complicated for me to understand. “If suffering is at least in some aspects pedagogic through its intimate place in ecologies of human life, then compassion also has to be honoured without idealization, along with its aporias, shadows, and absences” (McCaffrey, 2015, p. 19). Over the past months I have encountered and experienced compassion in various forms, knowing it to be both “wonderful when it manifests, but evanescent,

complicated, and mercurial” as well (p. 20). Soundbites bounce helplessly through my consciousness: “It could be worse...” and “He’s still with you...” or “What would he want you to do?” all intended to ameliorate the suffering, but in large part serving only to leave me feeling confused. Imagining something worse only makes me fearful for my daughters and we cannot live that way. Thinking he is the eagle flying above me, or that he is looking after me from the other side does not feel right either. I do not want to ascribe things to Mark which may or may not be him/his to somehow make me feel better about where I am finding myself. And while I have many conversations with him in my head, I know that his side of the conversation has been filtered through my own creative impulses and intense desire to be in his presence again.

It dawns on me as I write this that there is a compassionate voice that has always soothed me, comforted me, appeared when I needed it most, and moved me to new places; the voice that brings me songs. My most steadfast companions, they can carry me when and to where no one else can. Sometimes they answer my call for help, other times they emerge from the shadows. When they fail to appear, I know that I am just not ready yet and I need to be patient: spend time with my daughters, talk with a friend, dig in the garden, or go for a walk. I used to think that I had to be inspired to write a song, but over the years I have learned that I just need to be open to listening for it, having a sense that it is already out there, playing at a frequency that perhaps only I can hear. Whimsical perhaps, but when Talbot (1991) explores reality through Bohm’s notion of a deeply connected, holographic universe in which the entire universe is reflected in each of its tiniest parts, I am drawn to the idea of non-locality. How if “all points in space [become] equal to all other points in space, [it is] meaningless to speak of anything as being separate from anything else” (p. 41). If, like in a hologram, reality is created through intersecting frequencies, then “when a particle appears to be destroyed it is not lost. It has merely enfolded back into the

deeper order from which it sprang” (p. 47). Where Einstein put space and time on a continuum, Talbot tells us that Bohm believed the entire universe was part of a continuum and that “despite the apparent separateness of things at the explicate level, everything is a seamless extension of everything else, and ultimately even the implicate and explicate orders blend into each other” (p.48). In that way, compassion is the recognition, honouring and cherishing of our connections and not just simply ‘ergo, but for the grace of God, go I’.

Our brains mathematically construct objective reality by interpreting frequencies that are ultimately projections from another dimension, a deeper order of existence that is beyond both space and time: The brain is a hologram enfolded in a holographic universe. (Talbot, 1991), p. 54.)

That I hear songs and they act as a compassionate voice makes me hopeful there is another level to this reality. Perhaps, just outside the kiosk where I asked for “the works,” Mark is waiting for me, excited to see me so we can compare notes and decide whether we would recommend the “quick trip” to the small blue dot to others. In the meantime, I will listen and playback in my mind the songs that not only connect me to him, but guide me as I fumble my way toward him within this universe of interconnectedness that made our brief moment in time together possible, knowing if given the option, I would do it all again.

Hence, our everyday experiences of the variety of levels in ourselves, accompanied by a tendency toward realization of higher levels, become experiences of values; experiences of our obligation; experiences of the existence and development of moral command; imperatives of a definite content; grounded on the understanding and experiencing of the growth of multilevelness in one’s own internal and external world. (Dabrowski, 1970, p. 140)

As much as I am tired of winter, I have been dreading the time when our garden would appear from under the blanket of snow that has kept it hidden for these past months. Every rock, every raised bed, every shrub are the result of Mark's physical efforts and aesthetic eye. It was the place where he would sit to contemplate life, where we would gather as a family to eat and play, where we would invite friends to sit around a fire and share in various celebrations. I did not think that I would be able to bear being in it without him, let alone face the incredible task of gardening alone. But as the temperature leapt into the summer realms and the snow magically disappeared, I ventured out and began clearing away the dead plants and leaves. I felt like the garden had been waiting to hold me in a warm embrace. Suddenly all the chores that before had weighed me down and thrown me off have become an expression of love.

In closing this chapter I must share that this grief, this disintegrative process, is far from over. I achieve moments of clarity and peace only to find myself pulled back into the black hole, the process of entropy and evolution requiring more from me as life continues to unfold. I am struck with the reality that there is no quick fix to suffering and that to be compassionate with ourselves and others we must understand this. There is nothing and no one who can save us from the suffering of losing a loved one or learning something that will reimagine the world as we know it, as each one takes its own path and time.

There are many ways in which the dynamism of inner psychic transformation operates. Stimuli are intellectually and emotionally differentiated into many levels, observed, compared, and associated with previous experiences, which results either in their affirmation or their rejection. Different kinds of experiential content are assimilated or eliminated. Discrimination in the worth of stimuli and experiential content is set against

the personality ideal. Such discrimination depends on the growth of the hierarchical organization of the whole personality. (Dabrowski, 1970, p. 74).

The evolving hierarchy of values that guides us toward who it is we hope to be must navigate what may be the tremendous loss of what was. Compassion understands this and sits with us patiently as we find our own way through suffering that grief.

*So this is how it's gotta be
With you so far away from me
Softly strum on my guitar
To try to get to where you are
People say you're happy now
I wanna get to you somehow
So I can feel that way again
'Cause here you know it's not the same...*

*And if we're just vibrating strings
There must be a song that I can sing
So I can find you with my heart
Like we were never torn apart...*

*So this is how it's gotta be
With you're so far away from me
Softly strum on my guitar
To try to get to where you are
I'm told you're in a better place
I wish that I could see your face
'Cause here it's empty without you
Not sure what I'm supposed to do*

*And if we're all just holograms
Photons on crisscrossing paths*

*Can't you find a frequency
And beam yourself back here to me...*

*So this is how it's gotta be
With you far away from me
Softly strum on my guitar
To try to get to where you are*

With the discovery of superstring theory, musical metaphors take on a startling reality, for the theory suggests that the microscopic landscape is suffused with tiny strings whose vibrational patterns orchestrate the evolution of the cosmos. The winds of change, according to superstring theory, gust through an aeolian universe. (Greene, 1999, p. 135).

Chapter Seven: And Then There is That Wave Function

In order to accurately predict what a system made of many parts will do next, you need to keep track of the information of all the parts. Lose just a little bit, and you know nothing. Emergence happens when the opposite is possible: we can throw away almost all the information, keeping just a little bit (as long as you correctly identify which bit), and still say quite a lot about what will happen. (Carroll, 2019, pp. 237-238)

Introduction

The diversity that finds its way into classrooms striving for inclusion each day, is as mind boggling as the number of potential worlds proposed by Many-World's theorists— $2^{10^{112}}$ (Carroll, 2019, p. 166). No wonder so many teachers feel overwhelmed. No wonder so many individuals struggle with finding their place. Perhaps this is inevitable as research and time leads us to consider the many dynamics at play in order to better understand our students and their needs with each new consideration adding dimensions. Where does this leave the classroom teacher? In the world of quantum physics the “enormous amount of mathematical calculations to describe them [many worlds] all” (p. 154) has many looking for a simpler theory. Sometimes in that process “they don't want to accept the existence of other worlds, so they need to work hard to get rid of them somehow” (p. 154). This is not a new story. Whether referencing the imprisonment of Galileo for his advocacy of the Copernican model of the universe, or the impact of colonialism on the first nations of Canada, we are not at a loss for examples that demonstrate an inclination to suppress anything that shows us other versions of reality, especially when they create dissonance within everything we have come to know and rely upon.

Was it only yesterday that we watched the sun set

*Before the world started to spin?
I've tried reaching out to the heavens for an explanation
But all I feel is that wave rolling in
And I would stir the cream back out of my coffee
Put the beans back into the tin
If it would keep that wave from knocking me over...*

If we want to be truly inclusive and not suppress, let alone support, a student's ability to be truly authentic, doesn't that leave us scrambling with the equivalent of those same enormous mathematical calculations just trying to plan a simple lesson? We cannot forget Alberta Learning's Inclusive Education Policy (2015) which maintains "all children and students (Kindergarten to Grade 12), regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, or any other factor(s), have access to meaningful and relevant learning experiences that include appropriate instructional supports" (p. 25). All these considerations can leave one uncertain as to where to begin as the cornerstone of all scientific endeavours as well as educational practice is some measure of predictability. Interestingly, in physics "the uncertainty principle reflects the relationship between what really exists (quantum states) and what we can measure (one observable at a time)" (Carroll, 2019, p. 89) and in spaces striving for inclusion we feel the pressure to settle on a particular, measurable reality to avoid being overwhelmed by the anxiety that uncertainty can bring. Now we have another problem, even if we wanted to, we cannot not see what has been seen, Pandora's box and all...

*They say you can't take back a story once it's been lived
And it's written into your bones
And the versions that you've told to fill in the holes
Now have a life of their own (a life of their own)*

*Would you snatch that book back out of the fire?
 Roll the ink back into your pen
 If it would keep those fables from knocking you over?*

This brings us to a place where we are faced with two conflicting and equally impossible choices: to reverse entropy and go back to simpler times or begin logging, accounting, and designing for every possible reality. I would suggest that the tension created by proponents of one or the other of these choices is palpable in many arenas, not just our classrooms. If we were to take the Many-Worlds theory a little further, we would discover something about these worlds that could be helpful.

*But if the wave is all we've got to ride
 And fables light the way
 Is it time to poke the darkness
 To see what still remains
 I tried swinging at the world
 And that is when I knew
 The dark it ain't out there
 No the dark is in you...*

In the Many-Worlds formulation, the wave function in “characterizing what we know about reality” (Carroll, 2019, p. 41) is what is responsible for the creation of new worlds. Similarly, in AI what we know about reality is addressed through a series of assumptions that essentially argue that what we focus on becomes our reality and as a result “reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities” (Reed, 2007, p. 28). In creating these new realities AI draws on the belief that within “every society, organization or group, [there is] something [that] works” (p. 27) and thus an appreciative gaze can reveal realities that may not have been evident before employing it as a wave function in the current reality.

What did we discover as we cast an appreciative gaze on our emotional responses and their connection to the inner milieu and the internal conflicts that are at the heart of the disintegrative experience? Did it offer self-understanding and understanding of others who may be struggling in spaces striving for inclusion? Did it help identify features in our current spaces that could be built upon as we dream about possibilities for the future? Our ability to face what lies ahead of us relies on the confidence we have in what is already known and the courage to consider that what we thought we knew, may change with our perspectives. Finding self-understanding and strength in our own dark spaces as they challenge us to consider who it is we hope to become in the face of new challenges saves us from the futility of trying to undo what cannot be undone in a world that continues to move through space and time.

*Would you stir the cream back out of your coffee
 Put the beans back into the tin
 If it could keep the darkness from knocking you over?
 Would you snatch that book out of the fire
 Roll the ink back into your pen
 If it could keep the darkness from knocking you over?
 Would you pull that ballot back of the box
 Push the egg back into the hen
 If it could keep the darkness from knocking you over?
 Keep the darkness from knocking you over
 Keep the darkness from knocking you over
 When there's no way back only forward
 Into the dark...*

The Black Box: Summary of Findings

With logic in mind, one navigates the world and completes challenges without asking questions. With emotion, one perceives the routes in the world and faces challenges in a manner that identifies and clarifies what these routes and challenges are and what do they really mean for them. (Student Co-Researcher).

TPD as a Lens for Self-Understanding

In the same way that quantum mechanics “forces us to confront this yawning chasm between what we see and what really is” (Carroll, 2019, p. 70), the TPD challenges us to consider the depth of what may be happening within the inner milieu when experiencing/observing emotional responses within ourselves and others. In projecting how knowing the theory could impact how they respond to or process their emotions, the responses from the student participants carry a sense that for many, viewing the emotions in a positive way allows them to engage differently with the challenges they are facing. An acceptance of the role of emotions as vital in development means “one less hurdle to jump over” (Gabby) in negotiating challenges. Seeing emotions in a positive light “stops them from becoming toxic and extremely crippling” (Daniela), providing space for reflection and thoughtful response. Depathologizing emotional expression “helped with validating the anxiety or depressive episodes, which used to cause a lot of doubt in self-worth and feelings of incompetence” (Medea). From meaning that they could “walk with more confidence and a sense of assurance” (Katie) to having “a new lens through which to process [emotions]” (Grace), there is apparent value in sharing the theory. Will it make life simpler? Not necessarily. Dabrowski (1967) writes that it is only through some of these painful and difficult experiences that we will eventually become more truly ourselves as authentic and autonomous individuals (p. 78). For Grace, understanding the disintegrative

process has meant “you really should let yourself feel your emotions and explore why you feel that way so your fears and doubts can’t control you.”

TPD as a Lens for Understanding Others

I recognize that they feel things that may be different than what I may feel in a situation. I feel that it is my obligation to understand and acknowledge their emotion, otherwise I would have failed myself as a person who also has emotions. (Student Co-Researcher)

In the introduction to Dabrowski’s (n.d.) unpublished work *On Authentic Education*, he writes that “the overall goal then, is to harmonize individual authentic values with the needs and values, the ‘developmental inner truths’ of others” (p. 1). Does learning about the theory and applying this lens to our individual lives allow individuals to comprehend what this might mean? Caitrin captures this complexity well as she explores the intricate web of dynamics we navigate daily as we strive for authenticity.

Emotionally, the world is infinitely complex. By understanding and embracing my emotions in harmony with logic, I tend to see more perspectives. However, this makes it difficult for me to decide on anything, especially when other people are involved. Being empathetic toward both my own conflicting values and the conflicting values of others makes it virtually impossible to ever come to a true consensus, either internally or externally. I second guess myself, and rarely feel 100% satisfied when I do make a decision. Fortunately, I find some comfort in knowing that I consider options before deciding anything, so while I’m rarely satisfied with what I do, I know I wasn’t doing it uninformed, so at the very least I have made a partially acceptable decision.

For Dabrowski (n.d.), the journey to becoming authentic comes about through a combination of “an appreciation of personal dignity towards others with the same attitude toward

ourselves which in turn transfers these attitudes to the group” (p. 2). Many of the student participants shared that knowing the theory would make a difference in how they perceived and responded to others which would allow them to be more empathetic, have more patience, and be more comfortable around struggling students.

TPD in Spaces Striving for Inclusion

When it comes to sharing the theory further, Zoe writes that “teachers should be the first ones to learn about it.” She shared how exhausting it has been to respond authentically to the world on her own after a close friend moved away, recognizing now that “I’m always questioning every (underlined in original) single decision, without relieve [sic] and it’s tiring.” This struggle materialized in the final reflections on the theory of teacher participants who indicated that the TPD helped them see the courage required of those who feel so deeply to find their way about in a world where their own beliefs may not fit with the status quo. In reflecting on how this impacted their perception of those with a variety of emotional expressions, they felt it would enable them to be more present, more vulnerable, and allow them to respond to emotions in a supportive way, offering space instead of judgment. Terra in particular felt that knowing the theory would help her articulate what she has felt intuitively about the emotions of colleagues, whom she observes are often unsure how to respond or interact with students who are struggling.

Within the classroom striving for inclusion, the “chasm between what we see and what really is” requires a lens that allows us to see it through a different perspective as we struggle with questions like “Is inclusion working?” The TPD lens, for both students and educators within that space, offered not only a different perspective, but also a potential mechanism for navigating the inner and external spaces in a manner that honoured the individual journey while respecting

the journey of others. There is however a cautionary note to add from the student participants who worried that an incomplete understanding of the theory could result in misapplication with disastrous consequences. This could extend from the experiences they shared with respect to being labelled as *Gifted*, rendering them especially concerned over how and with whom the five levels outlined within the theory are shared and understood.

Recommendations: Identifying and Building Upon Existing Positive Supports

At the heart of the AI process lies what Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2008) refer to as the positive core. This gave the participants the opportunity through reflection on their school experience to “value its history and embrace novelty in transitioning into positive possibilities” (p. 34). In physics Carroll (2019) tells us that “it shouldn’t come as a surprise that a single quantum state might exhibit different notions of position and locality depending on what kind of observations we perform on it” (p. 306). In reorienting themselves to their experiences within spaces striving for inclusion through the TPD lens, they were then asked what emerged as the positive supports from which potential change could find a foundation and potentially grow?

Student Participants

Emergence in this sense does not refer to events unfolding over time, as when a baby bird emerges from its egg. It’s a way of describing the world that isn’t completely comprehensive but divides up reality into more manageable chunks. (Carroll, 2019, pp. 235)

Student participants were aware of many existing positive supports within their school district that could be built upon and/or modified in a way that would support their individual development. Whether it was about having more quarter courses, even in core subjects, so they could have the chance to sample more possibilities while limiting others or making it possible for

students to recommend themselves to the gifted program, issues around access and autonomy were central features in their provocative propositions. They questioned, “What if inclusion were about the option of including oneself in the spaces one feels would best address their learning needs as opposed to simply being included where space is available?” This would include access to accommodations that are already available to some struggling learners, making these supports commonplace for all students. It would also include access to teachers whose style of teaching, or perhaps even personality, connects with not only how the student learns, but the kind of relationship they need for learning. This sense of autonomy and access was reflected in the teachers’ provocative propositions as well, coming from the standpoint of individual schools having more autonomy to meet the needs of their particular community, as well as more flexibility in providing students with opportunities to access learning that is meaningful to them. Having reached these provocative propositions through the lens of TPD, the degree to which access to meaningful learning and autonomy in making decisions about one’s learning are connected to mental health is an important consideration, especially in spaces striving for inclusion.

I have learnt the importance of humility. When I was younger, the term Gifted used to make me so prideful. When kids in my class struggled to understand things I would think they aren’t gifted like me, they just aren’t as good as me, but I have learnt that being good at school is a talent and other people have many other talents that I do not have. Learning to be humble has also changed the way people see me as a gifted student. People seem to be less jealous and more willing to learn about the gifted program and my gifts as I am more ready to learn about their talents and their gifts. (Daniela)

Whether expanding the gifted program to include a greater diversity of gifted individuals or creating a gifted mentorship group, the underlying sense is that there is both value and burden in being identified as gifted was an interesting paradox brought forward by the student participants. Could we offer students a means of applying to the gifted program themselves? Should those gifted in areas that cannot be assessed through a cognitive abilities test have another means of accessing programming? Could we have more teachers who understand giftedness and gifted students, not only improving the current referral process, but also available to support a larger gifted program? While this proposition felt affirming in its suggestion that the program be accessible to a broader group available meant that the participants saw value in what had been offered them, and that there were definite areas for growth and the challenge of the program being valuable to all students, identified or not. That several of the student participants felt motivated to be part of a mentorship program for gifted students suggests that not only is there a connection that they have with one another, but that the label offers them a space where they feel a sense of inclusion. Their desire to be able to support others who are navigating their worlds with a gifted label suggests an openness to how they might engage with the world differently both for themselves and others.

Teacher Participants

Exploring the existing positive supports with the teachers, several programs were identified: Montessori and its ability to follow the child, available gifted programming which has also supported the Destination Imagination® for many schools, and The Virtues Project™ as a guide for how to live and model the virtues. Each of these programs offers a non-academic lens through which to view students, focusing on individual needs, strengths, and character while offering autonomy in exploring/developing those same individual characteristics. To apply the

strength of these programs on a broader scale would entail building relationships both within the community and with students by supporting more autonomy to schools and teachers, and authentically meeting the needs identified by those communities and students. As a provocative proposition, this requires teachers and administrators to feel both competent and confident in working with more autonomy, guided by a new or perhaps broader understanding of development as well as a process that allows them to build on and expand what works in their learning community. An appreciative exploration with teachers and administrators around the features that support this level of autonomy would be a valuable avenue for research.

There was also recognition that within the district there are many teachers who have the “ability to see beyond what is there” and are “able to connect with a child with behaviours and recognize that behaviors are a form of communication” (Marcia.) Building on these existing resources, a second provocative proposition explored a model school where students exhibiting trauma responses could be supported by teachers and other professionals when classroom accommodations failed. This proposition reflects a similar worry of the student participants that a surface understanding of something like TPD can result in misapplication or misunderstanding of the theory.

Truly supporting students experiencing disintegration requires in-depth knowledge of the theory and commitment to supporting what Dabrowski (1967) called “specific character of the individual’s structure” (p. 153). He outlined two groups of characteristics he felt would be present in an ideal adviser. The first referred to the individual’s own personality, including having navigated their own disintegration with “developed and conscious inner milieu, a developed third factor, a distinct hierarchy of aims” as well as a clear personality ideal. The second were qualities that came from study and experience, which included preparation in

psychology, pedagogy, and philosophy in order to understand the needs and experiences of someone in the process of personality development. But at the border between those capacities he distinguished one critical quality which is that of good will (p.153). How to place these requirements into a job description would be a challenge but might also open up an interesting area of research to explore. As our district has included the importance of academic, social *and* emotional development into their priorities for teaching and learning this may mean the time for a new understanding of emotional development in the form of TPD has arrived.

Conclusions

‘Cause she never tried, even with this study, she’s not trying to tell people what gifted kids are or tell gifted kids what we are or what that means, she’s just trying to help us figure our lives out and that’s what we need honestly. (Grace)

It is important to note that while the provocative propositions may have value beyond the setting in which this study took place, they emerged from a particular site with a group of students who were identified as gifted and had access to relationships and programming that will be different than what is offered elsewhere. What is significant in this study, is how the appreciative inquiry process enabled the participants to utilize a different lens, suggesting perhaps that AI could be a useful tool in exploring the TPD with other individuals in other settings. In addressing inclusion, as much as this process allowed the participants to imagine possibilities for themselves, the gifted program and the school district, following a similar process in other settings could render even more possibilities.

All of us had very similar experiences as gifted students and our time together talking has been invaluable. Everyone has agreed it’s been “therapeutic” and somewhat validating to

share our thoughts, ideas and experiences and to all be truly listened to and taken seriously. (Grace)

Inviting the creative forces of our students and teachers into how we imagine the future is an act of trust requiring new kinds of relationships. In AI novelty is nurtured through opening a space where “hierarchy is suspended; harmony is postponed in favor of curious questioning” replacing “symphonies of logical rationales” (Cooperrider, et. al, 2008, p. 24). Here is where creativity steps in both in harnessing the emotions and channeling them into resolving difficult life situations. Dabrowski believed that art for the sake of art was of “minimal significance when compared to creativity which attempts to resolve the problems of life, death and immortality” (Dabrowski, n.d., lines 475-476) but that it was through creation that we learn to resolve our internal struggles. That many of the students wanted options to be considered as valuable as what are currently considered core courses, suggests that they understand the importance of cultivating creativity. This sentiment was captured by Caitrin in her reflection on the virtues that had helped her navigate her school experience.

Creativity is the one that comes to mind most strongly. Not only has my love of the creative arts helped me to understand and express myself in difficult times caused by school, creativity has allowed me to find unique ways to shape my own academic experiences and make school a more engaging place to be.

More Conclusions

*I was just about to take our love for granted
When the winds shifted and the sun slipped behind the clouds*

When I penned these lyrics a year ago, I was just about to embark on recruiting co-researchers. I was the gifted program coordinator with the local school district and Mark was alive.

*I didn't even hear the storm coming
Just a crash of thunder screaming "Who's going to love you now?"*

If I were a superstitious person, the appearance of these lyrics would appear like an ominous foreshadowing of what was to come. If I ascribed to the theory that we live in a holographic universe, I might worry that in capturing this particular mus[ing] in song, I had somehow created the year that has followed. I won't deny that I haven't considered how life might have been different if I hadn't gone through my songwriting process that Saturday morning, strumming my guitar and opening myself up to creating order out of all that had been going on in the world and my head for the previous week. I have also considered the possibility that on a subconscious level, I was already sensing the subtle differences in Mark as the tumour was growing in his brain or at the very least the changes that were coming with the potential shift in our provincial politics.

*It's not enough to say we're gonna ride this one out
We can't just hunker down and hope that the sun will come out...*

I have tried to imagine what this past year would have been like without my understanding of the TPD and the opportunity to reflect on it both as researcher with co researchers, and personally through the middle of a multilevel disintegration. Harkening back to Stephen Hawking (1993) who wrote that a good theory is able to describe a "wide class of observations" but to ask if a theory is real is pointless because theories are what shape our reality (p. 44) it feels important to explore what this theory has offered me that might be valuable to someone who is contemplating whether the theory that they currently ascribe to is not adequately supporting their experience, or perhaps their idealization of the world.

I think I would begin with the insight into the **complexity of the inner milieu** and the self-education process that comes through what Dabrowski (1972) described as "a continual

sense of looking into oneself as if from the outside” (p. 4). This subject-object orientation enabled me to see myself and the world around me in a new light. Like the degree to which humility and fear battled for my attention while logic attempted to navigate the worlds of science and pseudoscience looking for a solution or way out of the black hole that opened up in our lives. How all the platitudes and products that we subscribed to in order to insulate ourselves from the devastation of death only managed to obscure from us what we were truly feeling and who it is we truly were in some of those moments. How progression or development is not linear as you bounce between Dabrowski’s levels like a ping pong ball, desperately trying to find some purchase or purpose in everything you are experiencing. How sometimes a temper tantrum is the only way to let someone know that they are unable to see everything you have seen and know and that at this moment in time, you need them to see what is hiding behind all the controls and rules that obscure and distort the reality of the whole story.

On another level, the understanding that **empathy** does not come from attempting to walk in another’s shoes, but from being able to see yourself through a compassionate lens through connecting with your inner voice, acknowledging your imperfections, and forgiving yourself for not being all you hoped you could be. Dabrowski (1973) described empathy both as sympathy toward and a desire to help others coupled with “the reflective identification with individuals of different levels of mental development” (p. 87). Through empathy you are able to see others in the beauty of their imperfections and recognize they may have a complex inner milieu as well. You can now see how they may be courting fear, insulating themselves, ping ponging through the levels or potentially obscuring their own inner voice in favour of something that feels more solid, comforting. You also recognize that you may well be where they are if life had not had other plans for you and that you are connected on levels that may not be obvious.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, was how the songs written at various points of my journey with Mark, carried me and reminded me of what mattered, and played like a soundtrack in my head through the past months. How the **creative instinct** defined by Dabrowski (1973) as “that instinct which discovers and molds new forms of reality” (p. 27) helped me to discover what it meant to be a companion on this most sacred of journeys. In the composing and playing of Let’s *Keep This Sacred*, I was reminded that it is all sacred: every moment we share with another human being, every step we take on this beautiful planet—every painful, joyful, fleeting moment. We cannot let fear distract or insulate us from the intensity of the emotions that connect us to this sacredness because then we all lose. I believe that those children, with their intensities, their diverse emotional expressions, their anxiety and depression, are trying to remind us of that. And the only way to support them on their journey through the vast universe that is their inner milieu, is to have a better understanding of our own.

*‘Cause the temperatures rising
And ice caps are sliding
Into seas that are dying
And we think we’re still in control
Minor infractions/knee jerk reactions
Measured reactions/to major infractions
In the age of abstraction/distractions
And someone thinks that they were the first one to uncover a black hole.*

If we train ourselves to discard our classical prejudices and take the lessons of quantum mechanics at face value, we may eventually learn how to extract our universe from the wave function. (Carroll, 2019, p. 307).

Epilogue

The journey so far has already made evident that reality is governed by mathematical laws that are indifferent to codes of conduct, standards of beauty, needs for companionship, longings for understanding, and quests for purpose. Yet, through language and story, art and myth, religion and science, we have harnessed some of our small part of the dispassionate, relentless, mechanical unfolding of the cosmos to give voice to our pervasive need for coherence and value and meaning... In the end, during our brief moment in the sun, we are tasked with finding our own meaning. (Greene, 2020, p. 16)

There was a moment, almost four years ago now, when the thought appeared in my mind that I needed to do a PhD and that it would involve the writing of a musical though not certain how it would come to pass. In reflecting on it now, I can see that it was a very deliberate effort to re-engage and reposition my creative instinct forcing myself to grow in new directions creatively, personally, and professionally. I could never have imagined the turns that life would take when I embarked on this journey, or how the opportunity to do this work would make them more bearable. But there will still be a musical, for there are songs that have been sourced from the vast reaches of the universe as it offers a mirror from which to consider the deep chasm of the inner milieu. There are songs that have been written to capture the nuances of the relationships that have contributed to the questions that were asked and the possibilities that emerged. This work is not the musical, but this work has made the musical possible. It will

explore “Education” through the eyes of a character who feels the energy of the world deeply and learns to trust their emotions as they learn to navigate their inner milieu to a place of peace and hope within themselves—despite living in a society that is not all that they can imagine it to be. That is how we keep the darkness from knocking us over.

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Appendix A: 2018 Dabrowski Congress Presentation

(Including Puppet Play)

There and Back Again: Taking Dabrowski to School

Susan Picard: Doctoral Student at Nipissing University

Presentation at 2018 Dabrowski Congress: Chicago

Good afternoon and welcome to my presentation. My name is Susan Picard and I am a doctoral student at Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario as well as the Coordinator of Gifted Programming for the Grande Prairie Public School District in northern Alberta. I am honoured to be presenting at the Dabrowski Congress this year.

Every time I read Dabrowski, I have made my way through five books now, some of them more than once, I feel like I am just scratching the surface. The depth and breadth to his work is staggering and I am quite honestly as much intimidated as I am inspired by it. I have taken up what I perceive as this “call” from Dabrowski (n.d.) in his writing in *Authentic Education* and am seeking to see how to bring him not only into my classroom but into my doctoral pursuits.

Dabrowski’s Call Out to Educators

...we should elaborate a complete system of education in which would be contained a program of individual development utilizing all positive elements of disintegration for the development of the individual and his creativity, while at the same time introducing prophylactic forces against negative disintegration and psychosis. (Dabrowski, nd, p. 52)

**some of the corresponding slides have been inserted in text boxes.*

Now as many of you might have experienced, not everybody “gets” Dabrowski, and some would say, you have to live it to get it, so I thought that it might help if I could bring along some travellers on this journey, travellers would resonate with others but ultimately connect back to Dabrowski’s work as an integrating paradigm.

So today I am addressing you not as any kind of expert (believe me, I tried but I suffered a major disintegrative experience about a week ago) and am here instead to call upon your interest, your expertise, your experience to assist me as I set myself up for the PhD journey and introduce you to the Dabrowskian travelling companions who I hope will add scope and connection to his work. My disintegrative experience in putting this together last week was when I realized that I was using size 9 font on my slides and was about to resort to size 6 to make sure I didn't leave anything out and I knew that I would have to simplify things a bit. So I took a step back and starting thinking about why I wanted to do this, and I was swept away into my classroom with my students and decided to proceed as if I were talking to one of them, but not one in particular, more of a composite version of several. In my imagination, I am having a conversation with them about who I am bringing to school to help me make my classroom more inclusive. I would like to introduce you to Pablo. Now I want to mention that my cohorts back at Nipissing warned me that I wouldn't be taken seriously at an academic conference if I used a puppet, but I promise you that this guy, while he might look a little suspect as an expert, is very much like many of my students has some pretty funny lines and Dabrowski can get pretty heavy if you're not careful so I think I need him.

Are you ready Pablo?

Pablo: Ready!!

So Pablo. Guess who I am bringing to school today.

Pablo: Who?

Kazimierz Dabrowski. A Polish psychologist and psychiatrist who came up with a theory about personality development called the Theory of Positive Disintegration.

Pablo: Why do you want to bring him to school?

Because he could offer us a different perspective on inclusion.

Inclusive Education

Alberta's Inclusive Education Policy is built on a values-based approach to accepting responsibility for all children and students. It takes into account learners' diverse backgrounds, interests and experiences to develop the foundation needed for lifelong learning. (Alberta Education, 2017, p.9)

Pablo: How so?

Inclusion has been described by Alberta Learning as “universal acceptance and belonging for all students,” which according to Dabrowski would indicate a level of personality development that is very hard to attain without a disintegrative process. And there is no guarantee that the process would be positive, especially if it isn’t handled correctly.

Pablo: Positive Disintegration?

It’s a process that involves getting knocked completely out of your comfort zone, until you have no idea what is going to happen next and then taking a look at your most deeply held beliefs and deciding whether they allow you to be who you really want to be as you painstakingly find your way out of the chaos.

Pablo: Are you out of your mind? Isn’t inclusion about making sure everybody is happy and gets along?

It feels like it should be pretty straightforward doesn’t it? But beliefs can be funny things. Sometimes, we don’t even know we have them until something unexpected happens that makes us question whether there’s something wrong with us or the rest of the world. We start to feel like perhaps we don’t belong in this world and wonder if there couldn’t be something better.

Pablo: Is that supposed to be the positive part?

Positive but not easy, because living up to that idea you have in your head can be really hard. Because you are so accustomed to doing things a certain way and everyone around you is accustomed to doing things a certain way- life is just easier when you have that predictability.

Pablo: So what does this have to do with inclusion?

Well, unless we are prepared to work hard at it, and get really creative about how things could be different, things are likely to stay the same. So even though we say a place is inclusive, if there is no change, many people may end up feeling like they really don’t belong and feel disconnected and angry.

Pablo: So how on earth could this Dabrowski guy help?

He suggested that teachers create situations where individuals have the opportunity to seriously and authentically question who they are and then introduce prophylactic forces that could assist and promote positive disintegration.

Pablo: Prophylactics? I think in our human sexuality class they called those condoms?

Prophylactic forces. I think that he was talking about a couple of things here. First was something he called a hierarchy of values. Dabrowski (1967) described them as values that have withstood the test of time that can be learned from great historical figures. Values regarded as absolute. (p. 6).

Pablo: You mean like Moses and the ten commandments?

No. He was pretty clear that they shouldn't belong to one particular religion or culture. He also believed that they shouldn't necessarily be the same for everyone. (p. 221)

Pablo: So what's the point of having absolute values if they're not absolute for everyone?

They don't work in our fast-paced world where we are absorbing new ideas and cultures into our lives. We don't have the time or opportunity to really recognize and accept one another in a way that would allow us to agree on shared values. This is a process that takes a tremendous amount of time. Cultures like these form over millenia.

Pablo: So you were saying something about this condom not being safe to use on its own?

Prophylactic force. Dabrowski also felt that these values should be introduced in a very subtle way by a kind and caring individual who would give the individual time and space to think about how he might be able to use it as a tool to help him out in the future. He called this regression. The values working together with how they are introduced create a prophylactic force by working together. (1973, p. 72).

Pablo: So inclusive spaces have no absolute rules outside of these prophylactic forces. So what's the problem? It sounds pretty good to me.

Humans are social creatures and most of us are set to default to what is easiest and that tends to be fitting in. So much so that we don't even question how our fitting in might be impacting the rest of the world. So while we convince ourselves that we are being open and inclusive, we might just be expecting everyone to accept the values that we think are right because in our minds, they make sense. And as long as we stay with our group, everything has a sense of rightness about it. Technology has made it easy to find our groups. (Dabrowski, K., 1977, p. 221)

Pablo: And the next thing you know, we have the alt left and the alt right buying up newspapers and social media platforms so they can make their group as big as possible and get the most votes and then make their absolute values absolute.

Slightly cynical and yet not entirely incorrect.

Pablo: And we fix this how?

Well, that's why I want to bring Dabrowski to school. In his theory, there is something he refers to as the third factor; that this third factor kicks in when we decide that we are going to take responsibility for ourselves and who we want to be based on the kind of world in which we want to live.

Pablo: Isn't that how dystopias work? Somebody gets this crazy idea of a perfect world that will work better and the next thing you know we're all living in some freakish nightmare?

That's why Dabrowski saw it as an independent journey. He referred to it as auto-psychotherapy saying that each individual is responsible for their own individual evolution becoming who it is that they want to become. He believed this would happen through discovering and embracing universal values like empathy, responsibility, creativity, and idealism. (1977, p. 221).

Pablo: You discover them? They're just hanging around somewhere? What if you don't find empathy? Then what?

Well that's why I personally think that we should be taking the Kavelin-Popovs to school with Dabrowski. They are the founders of the Virtues Project.

Pablo: Wait a minute. I thought we were talking about values?

Good catch. Virtues are gifts of character. Values are kind of like preferred virtues. Ones that are seen as more desirable.

Pablo: You mean the way we are always getting kindness and determination preached at us at school?

The Kavelin-Popovs believed that you shouldn't really teach the virtues per se. The Virtues Project believes that everyone is born with all the virtues and that we discover them by first learning what they are. Once we know this we can start looking for them in one another and honouring them when we see them. While everyone has the virtues within them, they can be underdeveloped or overdeveloped. It's all about figuring out the ones that are your strong guiding virtues and which ones you need to develop.

Pablo: So these are the condom forces you were talking about?

If we use them to make sense of our experiences yes. It gives us a positive way to interpret our experiences and lets us consider which virtue we might need next time to handle the situation in a better way. This gives us a sense of control over how we can approach situations that might happen down the road by knowing which virtue we need to call upon for help. The Kavelin-Popov's described this as teachable moments, very similar to Dabrowski's idea of regression.

Pablo: So why do we need Dabrowski? It sounds like the Kavelin-Popovs have this thing wrapped up.

Dabrowski was interested in how people respond differently to the world and what's happening in it. One really big thing he noticed was that some people are way more sensitive than others and express these sensitivities in different ways. As a result, this process of figuring out who they are and who they want to be can be pretty intense. So when they react to the "wrongness" of the world, either inwardly or outwardly, it can appear to be pretty extreme which can make it hard for others to see the virtue and instead wonder if there is something wrong with the person.

Pablo: You mean like the kid in our class who is always freaking out if something isn't fair? He needs to chill. He's got a chair in the principal's office with his name on it. He's psycho.

Dabrowski might have seen him a little differently. Try to imagine how would you react if you were dropped on a planet where all the rules seemed backwards? When you said something, everybody looked at you like you were crazy? And when you did what felt was right or said what you thought, they made you feel stupid?

Pablo: I'd probably freak out. And then I would try to find a way back to my planet.

And what if there was no way back?

Pablo: I'd try to fit in?

And if that felt utterly repulsive, contrary to everything you believed?

Pablo: I'd either have to walk off a cliff or try to take over the planet by subversive means.

Are those your only options?

Pablo: I could just do my own thing I guess. But honestly, this metaphor isn't working for me because we can't just live in a world where everyone does their own thing. How does my being on a planet doing my own thing do anything to improve anyone's life, including my own?

Well for starters, it demonstrates that there are different ways of being in the world that might in fact have their advantages. Like the kid who is freaking out. Maybe he's seeing injustices that no one else can see. Maybe he's the one who has been dropped onto a strange planet. Maybe he needs us to try and see what he's seeing. Maybe if we honoured him for his justice virtue, he might be able to see some of our virtues and learn from us.

Pablo: Didn't you say Dabrowski thought this was an individual journey?

Autopsychotherapy or something like that?

It is, but we do live in a world with others. I think Vygotsky would have to come to school with us as well.

Pablo: Vygotsky? Who is he? Sounds like he comes from the same place as Dabrowski.

Close. He was a Russian who was developing theories around social psychology about the same time as Dabrowski although Dabrowski lived much longer than Vygotsky.

Pablo: When was this?

In the 1930s.

Pablo: Yikes! These guys were doing some psychology in some pretty crazy times. How can this be relevant today? Wait a minute...these are pretty crazy times. Go on. Why should Vygotsky come to school with Dabrowski and the Kavelin Popovs?

Well Vygotsky didn't believe that you could learn everything on your own even though we are all born with a natural ability to learn. He also didn't believe that you could learn something just by a teacher writing it on the board, you copying it, and then passing a test. He believed that there was something called the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 220). He described this as the space between what you already know and what you are ready to learn. By observing someone model what is possible just beyond what you already know, you could figure it out and go from there which kind of makes it your own. This is that other part of Dabrowski's prophylactic force.

Pablo: So by us living true to our own values, without trying to force them on others, we can let others choose to learn from us or not? What if they don't learn from us? I mean really, isn't everybody kind most of the time? Especially in school. To be honest I learn what NOT to do from watching others.

So this is where it gets interesting. Like you said earlier, Dabrowski and Vygotsky were living and working in some pretty crazy times. We can all look kind and respectful when things are going well, but it's times of crisis that demonstrate who we are at our core. When something terrible happens, how will we respond and will we be happy with the way we respond?

Dabrowski believed that suffering was a huge part of our coming to understand who we are.

Pablo: So what are you saying? That we turn our schools into concentration camps or send kids off to the Gulag? You are out of your mind!

Well maybe Paulo Freire ought to come to school to help you understand this part.

Pablo: Who's he?

He's a critical theorist who looked at schools as oppressive places.

Pablo: You mean we're already in concentration camps? How did I miss that one?

Well I think Freire used a banking metaphor to describe learning; teachers make deposits in containers (aka students) that they assumed were empty. There have been others, however, who have compared schools to prisons with teachers as prison guards, or factories churning out good little workers.

Pablo: I don't get that at all. School works for me. Have you seen my report card? I am on my way to university, a great job and some big bucks. How could this be a prison or a factory?

Is it working for everyone? What about that kid in your class... the one with his name on a chair in the principal's office? Do you think it's working for him?

Pablo: Well if he would just do what he's supposed to and realize that life's not always fair, he'd be fine! And why isn't he learning how to behave from me and all the others in the class?

Is it possible that school might feel like a prison or factory to him? Or even a concentration camp?

Pablo: Are you out of your mind? We've got the best teacher ever!

Does he think so? Maybe he thinks she's a bully.

Pablo: A bully? He's always freaking out and she has to make sure that the rest of us can learn so she has to be pretty hard on him.

Is it possible that school might feel like a prison to him and the teacher seem like a bully? And that he might see the rest of you as mindless shells accepting the nasty way things are? It could be why he may not want to learn from you.

Pablo: Then he should go somewhere else!

You mean to another planet or maybe to one of those online places where he can find others who will agree with him about how nasty the school is?

Pablo: There are special classrooms he could go to.

And what would they teach him there?

Pablo: How to fit in with the rest of us... yikes! Isn't that what they tried to do in residential schools?

In Canada, the **Indian residential school system**^[nb 1] was a network of boarding schools for Indigenous peoples.^[nb 2] ...The school system was created for the purpose of removing children from the influence of their own culture and assimilating them into the dominant Canadian culture.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Indian_residential_school_system)

Well I don't think you could compare all special classrooms to residential schools but that is what they tried to do there, and we shouldn't forget that. But even in our school, we have behaviour plans, social coaching, and even medication, which while they can be helpful, can also help us miss the boat.

Pablo: Which boat was that?

The one we're using to get Dabrowski, the Kavelin Popovs, Freire and Vygotsky to school with! Remember that Dabrowski is telling us about learning from suffering and Vygotsky said that learning happens in the zone of proximal development?

Pablo: Yeah but I think that we've established already that it's not working. He's not learning anything from suffering or us.

Maybe you're supposed to learn from him.

Pablo: Learn what? How to drive your class crazy? How to fail at school so you never get to university and get a decent job? No thanks!

Remember when I put you on that planet not so long ago and you had relatively few options? I think you mentioned walking off a cliff or subversively taking over the planet. What would you have hoped that those nasty aliens would do for you so you didn't have to resort to those subversive measures?

Pablo: I don't know. Consider the possibility that I might have something to offer them?

Even though they thought the way things were were pretty great?

Pablo: But I might do or know something that they have never considered! I might hold a secret that makes their planet better for everyone. After all, if I am coming from another planet I might have a completely different use for something... like dandelions for example...in some places people spray them with pesticides but dandelions can actually be good for you, yet people will poison a perfectly good plant... what if I knew something like that, something that could save them from poisoning the plant and themselves and maybe even have a secret cure for their nastiness?

But what about their perfect lawn? Isn't that similar to the that perfect classroom you would have if only...?

Pablo: Wait a minute! Are you calling me a toxic pesticide user?

No... I'm just wondering if your classmate might be a dandelion?

Pablo: But that doesn't make sense. School is about learning and finding your place in the world.

That's all dandelions want.

Pablo: But if you're not careful, the dandelions will take over!

So use the pesticides.

Pablo: But I don't want to be a toxic pesticide user.

Why not?

Pablo: Because pesticides don't just kill dandelions, they can kill bees and bugs and all sorts of things that we need in order to keep growing fruits and vegetables.

So are you suggesting that what might be hurting your classmate and making him act out might be hurting others in your class as well?

Pablo: I thought we were talking about dandelions? No one else is being hurt because we are doing what we are told.

Are you sure?

Pablo: This is crazy making. If my friends and I are using the opportunity that school gives us to get ahead in the world how does that hurt us? If I have to worry about everything that I do in the world and how it might impact others, I am going to be a nervous wreck.

If the others matter to you, then yes, you might have to be a nervous wreck.

Pablo: Well what kind of person would I be if they didn't matter to me?

What kind of person do you want to be?

Pablo: Somebody who loves bugs and dandelions and bats?

Bats?

Pablo: They eat mosquitos.

I thought you liked bugs.

Pablo: Does anyone love mosquitos?

Bats do.

Pablo: So if I love the bats I gotta love the mosquitos?

What do you think?

Pablo: So inclusion isn't just about helping people fit in, it's about learning about how your own perspectives might be hurting not just others but yourself in addition to dealing with the feelings of being a total loser when you thought you were the good guy? (Pablo flings himself against my shoulder.)

Dabrowski in Praxis

The examination of what is positive and negative should be wisely repeated in a discrete form so that it will be an aid in the individual's self-development, and even in his psychotherapy and autopschotherapy. (Dabrowski, 1975, p. 52)

Feeling like a total loser is a kind of suffering that is really hard to deal with. Another word for it is shame. But if you want to look at it from a positive standpoint, Dabrowski thought that shame was one of those key elements that could drive you to become your best person. Shame pushes us beyond just thinking about things to really feeling them. Since it's a really uncomfortable

feeling lots of people prefer to blame the problem on those who are suffering so they never have to suffer themselves.

Pablo: So how do you know what's the right thing to do?

That's why we brought the Kavelin Popovs remember? They had a list of 100+ virtues that we could pick, choose, and decide how we could use them to guide our actions.

Vygotsky and the Virtues Project in Dabrowski's Work?

He has a need to rest, to put his experiences in order, to somehow synthesize them, and eventually to adjust to the future difficulties of life; but only after calming down, after being pacified, soothed and saturated by the experiences of warmth which provide him with new "developmental resources". This kind of regression creates prophylactic conditions for future collisions with the external environment; it constitutes a "mental injection" which immunizes against future difficulties. (Dabrowski, K., 1973, p. 72.)

Pablo: Right. And Vygotsky is there to remind us that through watching others and modelling who we want to be in the right place and time and way, we can all learn from each other.

You've got it. And Freire?

TPD as a form of EMANCIPATION and TRANSFORMATION?

The oppressed are not 'marginals' are not men living 'outside' society. They have always been 'inside'-inside the structure which made them 'beings for others.' The solution is not to 'integrate' them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves'. (Paulo Freire, 1990, p. 61.)

Pablo: I think Freire is trying to get us to open our eyes a bit. That the people who aren't succeeding or are stirring up trouble might in fact be showing us that what's working for us isn't working for them and if we blame them for their troubles we could be losing out. I think you're getting it.

Pablo: To be honest, this all sounds pretty simple and straightforward now that you've answered all my questions. Why do you need to do a PhD on this?

I think the reason that it sounds simple and straightforward is the fact that Dabrowski brings all of these ideas together into his theory but there are a few things that make the whole process difficult.

Pablo: Like what?

Have you ever tried to change a habit you didn't know you had? Or figure out why you do something that you do that seems to be working?

Pablo: Why would you?

Exactly. This is why I think we need to bring someone else to school with Dabrowski.

Pablo: Your metaphorical boat is getting full. You've got Dabrowski, the Kavelin-Popovs, Freire, and Vygotsky. This better not be a canoe or you're going to start sinking pretty quick.

Well Dabrowski and his colleague Piechowksi were interested in the work of another fellow by the name of Abraham Maslow. He developed something called the hierarchy of needs and at the top of his hierarchy was this thing called "self-actualization" which in some ways Piechowski believed was similar to Dabrowski's levels of personality development. (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1972).

Pablo: You didn't mention anything about levels. Is it important?

I think if you're a psychologist but not so much a school teacher. Anyway, Piechowski thought Maslow's highest level was about the same as Dabrowski's level four. He had five in all.

Pablo: So you think Maslow should be in the boat too?

Actually no. What I am really interested in is that Maslow's highest level was considered the lowest level on another hierarchy of needs while Dabrowski kind of mentions the second level of this hierarchy that Maslow missed, he doesn't talk about the top level of this other hierarchy.

Pablo: So whose hierarchy is this?

[Insert image from https://lincolnmichel.wordpress.com/2014/04/19/maslows-hierarchy-connected-to-blackfoot-beliefs/](https://lincolnmichel.wordpress.com/2014/04/19/maslows-hierarchy-connected-to-blackfoot-beliefs/)

Well apparently Maslow spent several months on a Blackfoot reserve in southern Alberta where he was inspired to start thinking about self-actualization. But because he saw the world in a completely different way what he didn't realize was that the Blackfoot Tribe felt that after self-

actualization came community actualization, something that Dabrowski alludes to, but above that is another level which was cultural perpetuity.

Pablo: Cultural Perpetuity? Wait a minute! I thought that culture was the problem in the first place? That we had to somehow find ourselves independent of the habits that we didn't know were habits that may have come from our culture that were keeping us from truly connecting with others?

Yes but I am talking about the concept of “true culture”. The one that one of my favorite farmers Masanobu Fukuoka was talking about. He said that “culture has always been closely connected with daily life, and so has been passed on to future generations, and has been preserved up to the present time. Something born from human pride and the quest for pleasure cannot be considered true culture. True culture is born within nature, and is simple, humble, and pure. Lacking true culture, humanity will perish” (Fukuoka, 1978, p. 138).

Pablo: So if you want to take care of humanity, you have to take care of the land? So who is getting in the boat to help us with that?

Well Leanne Simpson is an indigenous scholar who believes that we need an indigenous resurgence to deal with the issues facing the world. She reminds me of Dabrowski when she says that “we are each responsible for finding our own meanings, for shifting those meanings through time and space, for coming to our own meaningful way of being in the world. We are each responsible for being present in our own lives and engaged in our own realities” (p. 43).

Interestingly enough, Dabrowski didn't think that self-actualization was dependent on age, so if the Blackfoot put it at the bottom of the hierarchy...

Pablo: It means that school should be supporting us in becoming who we were meant to be as individuals instead of thinking that's going to come after they fill up our brains with the stuff they think is important. We've got some pretty serious cultural perpetuity to be working on.

But technology and over-population press us to accelerate the resolution of the imbalance between the thus far evolved mechanisms of bond formation and the consequences of isolation and mutual alienation. Our responsibility lies in our individual evolution, in our individual development and discovery of the universal values which are, perhaps, uniquely human, such as empathy, responsibility, creativity and ideal. These values, represented by self-actualizing people and shown to logically flow from the laws of emotional development defined by the theory of disintegration, can be our aim...

Dabrowski's Final Word to Teachers?

...and if there is anything universal about a universal ethic it is this: it does not impose itself on others-it lives by example. (Dabrowski, K., 1977, p. 221)

Do you see why we need so many people on this journey with us?

Pablo: Yeah...we're going to need them to paddle the boat.

I was thinking that we could ALL do some paddling.

Pablo: Did you see these funny little arms I've got? How am I gonna paddle with these? I'll carry the condoms.

I think we're done here. Thanks for the conversation.

And now that Pablo and I are done, I would love to have a conversation with you.

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Appendix B: Appreciative Inquiry Interview Questions

This afternoon we are going to go through a series of questions that we will answer in one of the following ways:

1. Individually in a journal format or recording a response to an iPad.
2. In pairs, interviewing one another and writing down each others responses.
3. In a small group with Susan as facilitator and various volunteers taking notes.

***Please remember that you do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. Please let me know if you have an alternative question that you think might be important to ask.**

OPENING APPRECIATIVE QUESTION (1:00-1:15pm)

Describe a “peak” experience or “high point” in your life? What were the things you valued most about yourself at that point?

One of the things that Dabrowski's TPD suggests is that our emotions and emotional responses are an important aspect of personality development or the journey of becoming who it is we truly wish to be. Think back over different times in your life, in school or at home, and **respond to one or more** of the following questions. **(1:15-1:30pm)**

1. Describe a time when you feel you made significant growth as an individual.
2. Describe an event that made you emotional/inspired you to act.
3. Describe a moment when you felt truly visible/understood/appreciated for who you are.

Another aspect of personality development centers around a hierarchy of values and the importance that these values be self-selected. Respond to one or more of the following questions. (1:30-1:45pm)

1. Think back over times in your life when you stood up for something that you truly believed in. This may include a time when no one else saw or understood what it was that was causing you to “hold your ground”. Describe the moment and what values caused you to act.
2. Can you remember someone else standing up for something that they believed in? What were they doing and what values were they holding strong?
3. Think of a time when you were anxious. Were there conflicting values that were competing for your action? Describe how you managed this inner conflict.

Questions relating to affirmative topic choices. Please respond to one or more of the following questions. (1:45-2:00pm)

One of the things that we all share is the experience of being in/going to a school where we had the opportunities to learn new things and discover what our strengths are and who we hope to become and what we hope to offer the world. As you think about your years in school, you can probably recall many ups and downs, high points and low points. For a moment, I would like you to reflect on a high-point experience. An experience that is memorable and stands out, a time when you felt most engaged, alive, challenged and effectively working towards who it is you are hoping to become.

1. Please share the story of that experience. Where was it? What happened? What were your feelings at the time? What values were an important part of that experience?
2. Let's imagine that I had a conversation with those people (teachers, friends, parents) who know you best, what qualities, strengths or virtues do you think they would use to describe you?
3. Based on the journey that you've been on in becoming who you hope to be, would you be willing to share what strengths, talents, virtues that you've drawn on to make your way through being not only a student, but a student identified as gifted in our district?

BREAK (2:00-2:15pm)

1. What was the most appreciative quotable quote that came out of the interview questions?

2. What was the most compelling story that came out of this interview? What details and examples did the interviewee share? How were the interviewee and/ or others changed by the story?

3. What was the most life-giving moment of the interview for you as a listener?

4. Did a particularly intriguing “golden idea” emerge during the interview? If so, describe what you learned about it, including who is doing it and where?

5. What three themes stood out most for you during the interview?

6. What small steps toward positive change emerged as being possible?

7. What broader steps of positive change emerged?

Appendix C: Guidelines for Good Provocative Propositions

- Is it provocative? Does it stretch, challenge or interrupt the status quo?
- Is it grounded? Are there examples that illustrate that this ideal is possible?
- Is it desired? Do *you* want it as a preferred future?
- Is it written in the affirmative?
- Does it expand the “zone of proximal development”?
- Is it a *participative* process?
- Is it used to stimulate intergenerational learning?
- Is there balanced management of continuity, novelty, and transition?

Discussion items around what the provocative propositions could address:

- Consideration around who is identified for gifted programming.
- What type of supports need to be available to those who are struggling-gifted and otherwise. (Is this simply a theory for gifted students?)
- What type of sharing/training could be recommended for teachers/others.
- What should the goals of gifted programming/education in general be?