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## Abraham Tannenbaum's five factors of giftedness as reflected in the life of American Artist, Georgia O'Keefe

Randi Lou Dingman Kennedy  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## Abraham Tannenbaum's five factors of giftedness as reflected in the life of American Artist, Georgia O'Keeffe

### Abstract

This research paper presents an analysis and discussion of Abraham Tannenbaum's five factors of giftedness as evidenced in the life of the eminent American painter, Georgia O'Keeffe. It includes a brief biography of Tannenbaum, a description of his theory, and an analysis of the existence of those factors in the life of O'Keeffe. Examined are the factors of general ability, special ability, nonintellective traits, environmental factors, and chance factors. In this case, it is evident that achieved eminence did depend, to some degree, upon the interweaving of these factors. Thus, they should receive consideration as part of the identification process in talented and gifted programs.

Abraham Tannenbaum's Five Factors of Giftedness  
as Reflected in the Life of  
American Artist, Georgia O'Keeffe

A Graduate Review  
Submitted to the  
Division of Education for the Gifted  
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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Randi Lou Dingman Kennedy

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This Graduate Review by: Randi Lou Dingman Kennedy

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has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

August 15, 1995  
Date Approved

William Waack

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Graduate Faculty Reader

August 16, 1995  
Date Approved

Marvin Heller

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Graduate Faculty Reader

August 18, 1995  
Date Approved

Peggy Ishler

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Head, Department of  
Curriculum and Instruction

## ABSTRACT

This research paper presents an analysis and discussion of Abraham Tannenbaum's five factors of giftedness as evidenced in the life of the eminent American painter, Georgia O'Keeffe. It includes a brief biography of Tannenbaum, a description of his theory, and an analysis of the existence of those factors in the life of O'Keeffe. Examined are the factors of general ability, special ability, nonintellective traits, environmental factors, and chance factors. In this case, it is evident that achieved eminence did depend, to some degree, upon the interweaving of these factors. Thus, they should receive consideration as part of the identification process in talented and gifted programs.

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Abraham Tannenbaum's Five Factors of Giftedness  
as Reflected in the Life of  
American Artist, Georgia O'Keeffe

In the domain of gifted education, many theories abound concerning what creates and sustains a gifted individual in his or her area of expertise. Traditionalists such as Lewis Terman believe that giftedness is synonymous with high IQ and can be discovered through testing. Contemporary theorists such as Joseph Renzulli, Howard Gardner, and Robert Sternberg take a broader approach to the determination of giftedness. In addition to high IQ scores, they identify such factors as special abilities, task motivation, creativity, and a supportive environment.

Joseph Renzulli, for example, has developed the Enrichment Triad which is composed of three interdependent factors in determining and sustaining giftedness. They are above average intelligence, above average creativity, and task commitment. He points out that the interaction among the factors, not just one

factor, determines creative and/or productive accomplishment (Maker, 1982).

Howard Gardner (1993) has theorized that high intelligence can exist in seven ways: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and musical. He also believes that each can exist alone or in combination within an individual.

Robert Sternberg (1985) has identified three kinds of giftedness: analytic or intellectual, synthetic or creative, and practical or "street smart." He then applies them in his Triarchic Theory of Human Intelligence.

Another contemporary theorist, Abraham Tannenbaum, (1983) has presented a unique perspective which he calls the psychosocial theory of giftedness. He cites five factors that he believes must be evident and must interweave with each other if a person is to be gifted and achieve excellence through producing or performing in any area. The first four factors, which include general ability, special aptitudes, nonintellective traits, and a supportive and challenging environment, are similar to



those found by others in the field. The fifth component is rather unique: the role of chance. This particular factor, he believes, can determine the degree of success a gifted person achieves in life.

In K-12 education, the identification of children and adolescents for participation in gifted and talented programs, as well as special program development, very frequently emphasizes general ability and relies on IQ and achievement test scores. Other factors that can greatly influence a gifted and talented child's later success in life are deemphasized, or even worse, overlooked. Such factors can include those identified by Tannenbaum in his research: special aptitudes, nonintellective traits, a supportive environment, and chance. As a result of such deemphasis, many children and adolescents may not be given the advantage of special opportunities that could enrich their educational experiences and challenge them to higher achievement.

The question then arises: What can be done to make teachers of the gifted, regular classroom teachers, and administrators more aware of factors other than general ability in the identification of children and adolescents

for participation in special programming for the gifted and talented? One way to increase that awareness might well be a focused study of the observed relationship of the Tannenbaum factors to the lives of successful/ eminent persons in various disciplines with resulting increased awareness of their importance to school personnel as they observe and work with students in the classroom.

#### Statement of Purpose

As a teacher of gifted and talented children and as a teacher of visual arts, I became interested in the existence of studies of Tannenbaum's five factors as they related to the lives of successful/ eminent persons. Also, I could find no examples of application to highly talented individuals in the field of the visual arts. The purpose of this investigation, then, was to analyze the degree to which the five factors Tannenbaum listed as necessary to attain success/ eminence existed in the talent development of a recognized American artist. I have chosen as the subject of my study Georgia O'Keeffe. I selected her because she is recognized by art critics, peers, and the general public as an outstanding artist. Another factor in her selection was the fact that

O'Keeffe is a female, and it is my observation that studies of genius tend to focus on the gifted male.

#### Methodology

In conducting the research for this study, a search was made of Tannenbaum's published works. From these works, his theories of psychosocial giftedness were examined. The most comprehensive source proved to be his book, Gifted Children, Psychological and Educational Perspectives (1983).

Then, using Tannenbaum's five factors of giftedness, I reviewed the four published biographies of O'Keeffe which contained numerous copies of letters and personal diaries or diary entries. Using these sources, I searched for specific life occurrences during childhood and adulthood that indicated the existence of Tannenbaum's five factors. I selected one factor at a time and searched for evidence of that factor.

#### Analysis and Discussion

This section presents an analysis and discussion of Abraham Tannenbaum's five factors of giftedness as evidenced in the life of the eminent American painter, Georgia O'Keeffe. It includes a brief biography of

Tannenbaum, a description of his theory, and an analysis of the existence of those factors in the life of O'Keefe. Examined are the factors of general ability, special ability, nonintellective traits, environmental factors, and chance factors.

### Abraham Tannenbaum

Abraham J. Tannenbaum is a professor of education and psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he directs programs in the education of the gifted and of the behaviorally disordered. As a Ph.D. in social psychology, he has designed and implemented masters and doctoral programs in the department of gifted education.

Dr. Tannenbaum directed the federally funded Graduate Leadership Education Project from 1975 - 1980, a project which involved seven universities joining together to produce future leaders in the field of educating the gifted. He received the Hollingworth Award for research on the gifted in 1981 and the National Association for Gifted Children's Distinguished Scholar Award in 1985 (Colangelo and Davis, 1991).

### Tannenbaum's Definition of Giftedness

Tannenbaum believes that, in determining giftedness

in children, one must look for potential signs of giftedness since giftedness denotes a mastery or fulfillment in a given area. In the case of children, however, he feels that we are dealing almost always with promise. Therefore, he defines giftedness in children as follows: "It denotes their potential for becoming critically acclaimed performers or exemplary producers of ideas in spheres of activity that enhance the moral, physical, emotional, social, intellectual, or aesthetic life of humanity" (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 86).

Tannenbaum has pointed out that individuals making outstanding contributions to society often tend to show signs of promise in childhood. Therefore, he says, it behooves a culture to identify precocious children as the pool from which the most highly gifted may surface. Tannenbaum also states, "Precocity only signifies rapid learning of ideas or about people, the ability to grasp abstractions quickly and efficiently, and generally to display skills far beyond those expected at the child's age level" (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 86). He believes that the production of knowledge with originality and with great impact on society at large happens almost entirely

in adulthood.

As cited in Colangelo and Davis (1991), Tannenbaum presumes that, in order for a gifted child to become an adult who achieves excellence through producing or performing in any area, five factors must interweave: (a) general ability, (b) special ability, (c) nonintellective traits, (d) supportive and challenging environment, (e) chance factors. He feels that each of these is required if a person is to achieve excellence in any publicly valued area of activity. However, according to Tannenbaum, different domains may require differing amounts in each of these areas. For example, Tannenbaum points out that gifted artists may demonstrate exceptional talent in various art forms even though their general academic abilities are no greater than those of most college students. He states, furthermore, that it would be rare that science students without high academic promise could eventually become acclaimed as outstanding scientists. He assumes that differing degrees of IQ, spatial, and scientific aptitudes are different for artists and scientists. Those who fail to meet any of the minimum essentials for their respective fields could

not compare with those who excel in these fields.

To better understand Tannenbaum's five factors needed for a gifted child to become an adult who produces or performs exceptionally in any given arena, brief explanations of each will now be addressed.

#### General Ability.

According to Tannenbaum, the "g" factor, or tested general intelligence, figures on a sliding scale in all high level talent areas. This means that different threshold IQs are required for various kinds of accomplishments, higher in academic subjects than, for example, in the performing arts. Relative weight given to IQ, then, depends on the talent area in which the adult excels (Tannenbaum, 1983).

#### Special Ability.

Tannenbaum theorizes that giftedness means being exceptionally bright at doing something that is highly respected, to have special capacities and affinities for particular kinds of work. This special ability may lie in the fine arts, mathematics, science, leadership, or other recognized areas of production or performance (Tannenbaum, 1983).

### Nonintellective Traits.

Tannenbaum believes that certain traits are integral to the achieving personality, that ability alone cannot create vast accomplishment. Rather, it requires a combination of facilitators such as ego strength, dedication to a chosen field of productivity or performance, and delay of instant gratification in favor of long-term accomplishment. Some characteristics directly help an individual in performing or producing, and these consist of ambition, dedication, and intellectual hard work. Other traits are related to an individual's interaction with the world around him or her. These traits include the ability to call attention to themselves and their work through the uniqueness of personal charm and self-promotional savvy (Tannenbaum, 1983).

### Environmental Factors.

Tannenbaum (1983) suggests several conditions need to exist in the environment for most children to realize their potentialities and to determine the directions they will take. First of all, he indicates that parents and



other relatives can serve as role models through their own achievements and by cultivating other educational experiences outside of school for their children. They also can encourage their offspring to greater heights academically. In addition, he is convinced that a community rich in cultural experiences, such as libraries, museums, concert halls, and human resources, can serve as stimuli to children. Finally, he emphasizes that the quality of classroom instruction contributes in many cases to the gifted child's achievement level, as well as attitudes of their peers (Tannenbaum, 1983).

#### Chance Factors.

Not often regarded in other theories of giftedness is the role that chance plays in determining the realization and demonstration of talents in a given individual's life. Tannenbaum points out that there are many unforeseen circumstances in opportunities and current social structures which can enhance or diminish a person's success. He cites, for instance, a brilliant medical researcher about to achieve a breakthrough in disease control who may be abruptly distracted by a personal problem or loss of funding for his research.

Another example is a lawyer who may have outstanding reasoning abilities and leadership potential but may be "coming of age" at a time when attorneys have saturated the market. A third example is a chance meeting between a young actor or singer and the right director that can also pave the way to remarkable success in the theater, motion pictures, or opera. Chance factors, then, represent the entirely unpredictable events in a person's life which are critical to the realization of promise and to the demonstration of developed talents (Tannenbaum, 1983).

Tannenbaum holds that whoever achieves a degree of success in a given field has to qualify in each of these factors. In addition, he theorizes that if a person possesses just two or three of them, he or she cannot become truly outstanding (Tannenbaum, 1983).

### Georgia O'Keeffe

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) was one of the pioneers of modern art in the 20th century. She was famous for her lucid, geometrically composed desert landscapes and flower studies. O'Keeffe received formal training at the Chicago Art Institute, Art Students League in New York,

the University of Virginia, and Teachers College, Columbia. Her first exhibition was at Alfred Stieglitz' "291" gallery in 1916. Thirty years later, during a one-woman show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, her work still showed the fresh originality first found in her beginning flower pieces. She won the gold medal for painting from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1970), the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1977), and the National Medal of Arts (1985).

O'Keeffe's success/eminence in the visual arts cannot be questioned. The question then arises as to the extent of the existence of Tannenbaum's five factors in her childhood and early adulthood. Evidence of such existence will now be ascertained based on the analysis of biographical records.

#### General Ability.

As Tannenbaum stated, general ability refers to a person's overall intelligence; the importance of high IQ depends on the talent area in which the adult excels. He concluded that higher IQs are required in academic subjects than in the performing arts. What, then, was O'Keeffe's general ability and how did it affect her life

as an artist?

Born on November 15, 1887, Georgia Totto O'Keeffe was the oldest daughter and the second of seven children. Growing up in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, Georgia exhibited many characteristics of gifted children. As cited by Castro, (1985, p. 6), Georgia's elementary school teacher, Mrs. Zed Edison, recalled that she was "a loner who often popped up with curious questions, a bossy attitude, and perfectionistic tendencies." She learned to read and enrolled in school at an early age and excelled in academic subjects such as English and history. She attended this one-room school with 30 other students until the age of 13 (Castro, 1985).

After grade school, Georgia enrolled at Chatham Episcopal Institute where she compiled "a remarkably lusterless academic record and proved triumphantly obdurate about conventional methods of spelling" (Robinson, 1989, p. 44). In her senior year, her record at spelling was so abysmal that she was given a test. If she could not spell more than seventy-five of one hundred words, she would fail to graduate. Apparently Georgia addressed herself to academics and studied diligently and

spelled seventy-six words correctly (Robinson, 1989).

No information was found concerning acceleration or IQ test scores. However, it appears that in the area of general ability, O'Keeffe was brighter in some areas than others her age, but mostly average in her course work. Her academic achievement, however, did not seem to hamper her ability as a visual artist. It is possible that she would be identified today as an underachiever.

#### Special Abilities.

What evidence exists that O'Keeffe possessed the special ability to draw and paint exceptionally well? Obviously, in her later years, O'Keeffe was recognized as a unique and talented painter capable of creating her own vision of real objects on canvas. However, these gifts of "seeing" in her own way were evident in her first recollections.

According to Castro (1985), she remembered colors, shapes and textures as a toddler and enjoyed working with her hands as a child, creating dolls' clothes and doll houses. She often drew, copying pictures from her school books and displaying a keen understanding of perspective, shading, and detail. Georgia's attempts "to produce the

image that glimmered in her mind meant the capturing of a purely subjective element, mood, as well as a factual rendering" (Castro, 1985, p. 5). The discrepancy between the color of things as they are known and as they are perceived engaged her at once, as is demonstrated in her own description of one of her own creations:

The bare trees were black against the snow in the moonlight-but dark blue had something to do with night. I added dark blue to the black trees and made the strip of sky the color it seemed, a sort of lavenderish grey. For the nocturnal snow I left the paper bare for at night snow isn't white, but it must be made to look white

(Robinson, 1989, p.28).

According to Robinson, the problems of technical and emotional rendering would remain real to her throughout her life.

O'Keeffe's special abilities in the visual arts seemed to emerge during her school years. However, her standards were exacting; and, as she was accustomed to excelling, she was frustrated by her own efforts.

Central to any successful artist's temperament, however,

are perseverance and the ability to see a failed effort as merely a practice run. And rising to such a challenge was instinctive for her (Robinson, 1989). She won a medal in drawing at the end of her eighth grade year and was art editor of the school yearbook in high school (Castro, 1985).

O'Keeffe's humorous caricatures were positively received by the other students at Chatham Episcopal Institute, an all-girls boarding school in the country, and she won acceptance from the other girls despite her mannish, severe dress and likewise attitude. A classmate recalled:

How vividly I remember the first night Georgia walked into study hall at Chatham! As I had been in school a few days, perhaps a week, I felt perfectly competent to criticize this late-comer, especially as she was unusual looking. The most unusual thing about her was the absolute plainness of her attire. She wore a tan coat suit, short, severe, and loose, into this room filled with girls with small waists and tight-fitting dresses bedecked in ruffles and bows. Pompadours and

ribbons vied with each other in size and elaborateness, but Georgia's hair was drawn smoothly back from her broad, prominent forehead and she had no bow on her head at all, only one at the bottom of her pigtail. Nearly every girl in that study hall planned just how she was going to dress Georgia up, but her plans came to naught, for this strong-minded girl knew what suited her, and would not be changed (Robinson, 1989, p. 42).

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has stated that part of an artist's special ability includes the traits of ego strength and the capacity to remain an individual in thought, style or manner. It is apparent that O'Keeffe displayed these characteristics early in her life.

Pollitzer (1988), in her biographical research has found that, at Chatham, the girls came to admire O'Keeffe for the many things she could do well, but it was in the studio that she was queen. Mrs. Willis, the principal and art teacher, stated in an interview that she had never seen such talent and, a classmate, Christine McRae, said that the girls at Chatham expected her to be the greatest artist in the world. Pollitzer relates that



when O'Keeffe would draw a pencil sketch of one of her classmates, others' eyes would widen in wonder and admiration and remark that the drawing was like a photograph.

The editor-in-chief of the yearbook summed up her distinctive special ability in the following poem:

A girl who would be different in  
habit, style and dress,

A girl who doesn't give a cent for  
men - and boys still less.

O is for O'Keeffe, an artist divine;  
Her paintings are perfect and her drawings  
are fine (Castro, 1985, p. 8).

#### Nonintellective Traits.

Tannenbaum has cited that perseverance, dedication, intellectual hard work, and ego strength are nonintellective characteristics important to the success of a gifted individual. How are these demonstrated in O'Keeffe's life?

Christine McRae, a high school classmate, remembered that Georgia once declared very earnestly, "I am going to live a different kind of life from the rest of you girls.

After we are through school, I am going to give up everything for my art" (Pollitzer, 1988, p. 76). These are among the personal statements that seem to exemplify the nonintellective traits of dedication and motivation which O'Keeffe possessed. Robinson (1989) quotes her as saying "I worked at it intensely -- probably as hard as at anything in my life" (p. 29).

After graduating from high school in 1905, O'Keeffe enrolled in the Art Institute of Chicago. According to Lisle (1980), she found the physical surroundings within the school to be dark and depressing. In addition, the art classes stressed techniques and styles which did not interest her. For the first time she considered dropping out. However, she persevered the school year, thus again exhibiting the nonintellective trait of dedication to her chosen field.

Spending the summer in the family's new home in Williamsburg, Virginia, O'Keeffe contracted typhoid fever. During this time she was gravely ill and was forced to quit school for a year. After a painful recovery, she enrolled at the prestigious Art Students League in New York in the fall of 1907, living with her

brother who assisted her back to good health. Through her strong motivation, she thrived in the progressive atmosphere, enjoying a freedom and flexibility in her art work she hadn't known before. Unfortunately, money was scarce in her family so she moved back to Chicago to work as a commercial artist for two years (Eisler, 1991).

According to Eisler (1991), O'Keeffe felt stifled in Chicago and hated the routine work she was doing. As a result, she accepted a position in Texas as drawing supervisor for the public schools in Amarillo. During this time Georgia drew incessantly, experimenting with bold new shapes and images. She continued to dress as she pleased, in a severe and extreme manner in only black or white clothing, not caring what others in the community thought. Through these trials she relentlessly improved her art and had little regard for the opinions of others. Eisler further states that O'Keeffe believed in herself and dared to present bold and original subjects in a way they had never been painted. Gherman (1986) quoted her as once insisting, "I don't think I have a great gift, it isn't just a talent. You must have something else. You have to have a kind of nerve. It's

mostly a lot of nerve and a lot of very, very hard work" (p. 115).

#### Supportive and Challenging Environment.

Tannenbaum strongly believes that the family and school have a large effect on a gifted person's later chance of success. Further, he says that adult role models and rich cultural experiences greatly magnify future achievement. Did Georgia O'Keeffe experience such an environment?

O'Keeffe was exposed to a wide variety of influences at home and at school which helped shape her life.

Pollitzer (1988) states that as a child, O'Keeffe's mother reinforced her artistic outlook by providing private art lessons and reading action-packed stories of history, adventure, and travel. The stories included The Life of Hannibal, Stanley's Adventures in Africa, Arabian Nights, Pilgrim's Progress, and The Life of Kit Carson.

It was the Wild West stories of the cattlemen, buffaloes, and Indians that Georgia loved the best. As an adult, her adventures and ultimate move to New Mexico demonstrated interesting likenesses to these tales.

There was never a time when she was growing up that her

mother did not read aloud to Georgia and her brothers and sisters at night.

Pollitzer goes on to describe the O'Keeffes as a prosperous family and an intellectual one. Independence in thinking was encouraged. The women in the family were the forceful ones; and the girls, long before this was a generally accepted idea, were encouraged to be successful at whatever they did. She describes grandmothers as proud, independent, and dignified women who helped to raise her, and identifies two unmarried aunts whom she lived with during a few of her high school years. Thus, it appears that O'Keeffe gained much support and encouragement in her home and family environment.

O'Keeffe also had several teachers who profoundly affected her life and her art. According to Robinson (1989), drawing classes began at home in the winter of 1898-99, when Georgia was eleven. The teacher at the Town Hall School was boarding with the O'Keeffes, and she gave Georgia and her sisters lessons in the evenings. All were remarkably gifted, according to this teacher, and sisters Ida and Catherine were to become accomplished painters who exhibited their work in New York and

elsewhere.

When Georgia was 14 (Castro, 1985), her first school art teacher taught her to look closely at jack-in-the-pulpit flowers. She studied the flowers' strange shapes at close range. This attention and appreciation of aspects of nature which ordinary observers take for granted, or never see, began in her youth.

Another important figure in O'Keeffe's life was her high school principal and art teacher, May Willis. She allowed her to draw and paint freehand while the other girls were required to do china painting, recognizing her innate and unusual bent. Mrs. Willis encouraged this favorite art student to continue her studies at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Six years after graduation from Chatham Girls School, Mrs. Willis telegraphed O'Keeffe in Williamsburg to ask her to come to Chatham to teach in her place for 3 months, which she did. In later years, May Willis, then an elderly woman, traveled to New York again and again to see the annual O'Keeffe exhibitions (Pollitzer, 1988). This teacher contributed to Georgia's supportive and challenging environment. By recognizing O'Keeffe's

extraordinary ability, she qualitatively differentiated the curriculum to suit her student's needs.

In her biography, Pollitzer tells how, in 1938, decades after the O'Keeffe family had lived in Virginia, The College of William and Mary notified O'Keeffe that it was to confer the honorary degree of Doctor of Fine Arts upon her "for the Revealing Insight, Strict Integrity and Supreme Artistry of her work." The citation also declared: "Williamsburg may well find a grateful bond in recalling that in its quiet atmosphere her talents for vision and craftsmanship were first given an opportunity to mature" (Pollitzer, 1988, p. 80). Thus, O'Keeffe appears to have had strong support from many family members during her childhood, as well as from teachers who were aware of her unusual artistic ability. Her experience satisfies the fourth factor of a supportive and challenging environment.

#### Chance Factors.

Tannenbaum points out that there are many unforeseen circumstances in opportunities which can enhance or diminish future success. A chance meeting with the right person can lead to greater opportunities in a chosen

field. What was the role of chance in O'Keeffe's achievement of success as an artist?

O'Keeffe maintained a close friendship with Anita Pollitzer, who was later to become her biographer. The friendship was to last nearly fifty years. They became acquainted only because both of them enrolled at the same time in the Art Students League in New York City in 1905. They spent much time together discussing books and concerts, exchanging ideas, and analyzing the feminist movement in which Pollitzer was involved. They corresponded frequently when they were apart, and those letters proved crucial to O'Keeffe's development as an artist (Robinson, 1989).

O'Keeffe relied on Pollitzer for a corresponding response to her own intense involvement in art. For example, in 1915, she was approaching the concept of working directly from emotion in her painting. According to Robinson (1989), she sent three watercolors to Pollitzer, explaining them in emotive terms. Her friend's responses were immensely important: "Your letters are certainly great, I can't imagine what living would be like without them," Georgia wrote (Robinson,



1989, p. 123).

Robinson posits that, more than a good friend, Pollitzer was a valuable and perceptive audience who recognized the significance of the changes in O'Keeffe's work and was unafraid to state her own responses. As an example of this, he recounts an incident in which O'Keeffe wrapped up a bundle of her new, strange charcoal drawings and sent them off to Pollitzer. Pollitzer, who had continually encouraged Georgia in her work, saw that the latest series deserved a new level of response. Robinson quotes her response to O'Keeffe in a letter written in response to the receipt of the package, "Astounded and awfully happy were my feelings today when I opened the batch of drawings. I tell you I felt them!" (p. 128).

Eisler (1991) recounts that while Pollitzer was living in New York in the years before World War I, she was part of the avant garde scene of the time, the chief promoter being Alfred Stieglitz. He relates how O'Keeffe would often send a roll of drawings to her friend and how one day, quite by chance, Pollitzer happened to show these to Stieglitz. According to Eisler, Stieglitz was

overwhelmed with the freshness and originality of O'Keeffe's art and displayed it in a one-woman show at his gallery in New York called 291.

Stieglitz' continued commitment to Georgia's work was deep and genuine. He felt responsible for her entrance into the public arena. He also felt it was his duty to impress the artist with the magnitude of what she had done. Gherman (1986) states: "Her inherent strength and uniqueness interested and aroused him on every level. Because he understood and valued her work, she found him impossible to resist" (p. 73).

This event proved to be O'Keeffe's big break in her artistic career. Pollitzer's chance showing of her drawings to Stieglitz paved the way for her remarkable success as an artist. According to Castro (1985), she moved back to New York, fell in love with Alfred Stieglitz and prospered as he promoted her art with marketing skill. After 11 years of cohabitation and, finally, marriage at the age of 40, O'Keeffe became financially secure and independent, able to travel and produce her own style of art.

It would appear that had Alfred Stieglitz not

recognized O'Keeffe's incredible artistic ability, the world might never have known or appreciated one of America's truly gifted woman artists. However, as Tannenbaum once stated, "without intimations of high potential, no amount of good fortune can help the person achieve greatness; conversely, without some experience of good fortune, no amount of potential can be truly realized" (Colangelo and Davis, 1991, p. 30).

#### Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

##### Conclusions

It appears that, in varying degrees, Georgia O'Keeffe's life experiences fulfill Tannenbaum's theory of giftedness.

As Tannenbaum stated, general ability, or "g", needs to be higher in academic subject areas if a student is to excel in fields requiring such accelerated gifts. The research of O'Keeffe's academic career suggests an overall average general ability level. However, since her outstanding achievements were in the visual arts, she satisfies Tannenbaum's first factor that general ability need not be exemplary "across the board" but should be considered according to the talent area.

Georgia O'Keeffe exhibited special abilities at an early age. From all accounts, she drew often and performed this skill at a level considerably above other children her age. She continued refining her talent in the visual arts area through college and recurring art classes. She illustrated a superb gift for understanding form, proportion, and color and could demonstrate these realistically or abstractly. Thus, the second factor, special abilities, was apparent in O'Keeffe's life.

Nonintellective traits, which Tannenbaum believes necessary to propel a gifted individual to success, are ego strength, commitment, and perseverance. Georgia O'Keeffe displayed the former in her severe and unusual style of dress for her time and in her ability to pursue her talent area in an age when most young women pursued marriage and children. She displayed a commitment to honing her art by drawing throughout her young life and spending summers after high school attending a variety of art classes. Each of Tannenbaum's nonintellective traits is represented here.

It appears that one of the strongest factors of giftedness in O'Keeffe's life is a supportive and

challenging environment. As Tannenbaum has stated, children's early experiences help form the direction they take later in life. Thus, O'Keeffe's drawing lessons as a child and the availability of perceptive art teachers in adolescence contributed to her later success as an artist. She also was very fortunate to have strong role models in her grandmothers and aunts, as well as in teachers and peers who championed her artistic skills. Her life was certainly enhanced by the early care and support she received.

As discussed by Tannenbaum, chance factors can play an important role in the later success of a gifted person. Had Georgia O'Keeffe's chance meeting with Anita Pollitzer at the Art Students League never happened, as well as Pollitzer's subsequent sharing of O'Keeffe's drawings with Alfred Stieglitz, it is possible that she would have continued producing great art but without the world-wide recognition she eventually enjoyed. In every individual's life there are thousands of choices to be made, each in some way guiding the journey a life must make. But, as illustrated in O'Keeffe's life, chance can play a part in determining the success of that journey.

This paper has focused on the perceived existence of Tannenbaum's five factors of giftedness in the life of one individual who has achieved success in her chosen field. In this particular case, it is evident that achieved eminence did depend, to some degree, upon the interweaving of those five factors. With this in mind, a general conclusion could be drawn from this limited study that the existence of all of these factors should receive consideration as part of the identification process in talented and gifted programs -- that an analysis of general ability is not enough. It also could be concluded that talented and gifted programs should encourage and advocate supportive school and home environments in which the child can pursue his or her chosen fields of interest without inhibition. Finally, since this limited study does seem to sustain Tannenbaum's theory that unpredictable events in a person's life play an important role in the achievement of eminence, it might be concluded that the provision of the highest possible number of school and home experiences for children should be pursued in order to increase the possibilities for the chance factor to be

initiated.

### Implications for Further Research

The study of Tannenbaum's factors in relationship to their existence in the life of Georgia O'Keeffe, an eminent American artist, presents additional opportunities for related research which could be initiated. Some suggestions follow: a) a replication of this kind of study across many disciplines to discern if other eminent persons' lives show evidence of Tannenbaum's factors, b) in-depth studies through interviews of eminent people to gather evidence of Tannenbaum's factors in their early lives and, c) a sample of school district TAG programs to ascertain to what degree these five factors are used to determine the identification of gifted students.

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