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## **Operation Houndstooth Intervention Theory: Social Capital in Today's Schools**

**by Joseph S. Renzulli,  
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*Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes time.  
Vision with action can change the world!*

—Robert Barker (1993)

After repeatedly observing the little boy crying on the school bus, Melanie, a fifth grader, took a seat next to him and struck up a conversation. “You don’t understand,” said Tony, a first grader whose face was practically hidden behind the thickest eyeglasses Melanie had ever seen. “You see these glasses? I’m partially sighted. The kids trip me and make fun of me. I have special books for my subjects, but there are no books in the library that I can read.”

Later that day, Melanie approached her enrichment teacher and asked if she could make Tony her Type III Project for the year (Renzulli, 1976). Over the next several days, Melanie and the enrichment teacher drew up a plan that began with some “friendly persuasion” for the boys who were harassing Tony. A few of the school’s bigger, well-respected boys and girls escorted Tony from the school bus and sat with him in the lunchroom.

Melanie then asked Tony a series of questions from an instrument called the Interest-A-Lyzer (Renzulli, 1997) to determine what some of his reading interests might be. She recruited a number of the school’s best writers to work on large-print “big books” that dealt with Tony’s interests in sports and adventure stories. She also recruited the school’s best artists to illustrate the books and served as the editor and production manager for the series.

As the project progressed over the next several months, a remarkable change took place in Tony’s attitude toward school. He became a local celebrity, and other students even signed out books from Tony’s special section of the library. Melanie’s creative idea and her task commitment resulted in the development of profound empathy and sensitivity to human concerns among a number of children and at the same time allowed her to apply her talents to an unselfish cause. When questioned about her work, Melanie explained simply, “It didn’t change the world, but it changed the world of one little boy.”

Melanie devoted her time and energy to a socially responsible project that would improve the life of a little boy. She saw a real-life problem and decided to discover and implement a solution. Melanie dedicated her time to a cause that would bring her no personal gain other than the satisfaction of helping a person in need. However, Melanie did not do this alone. She was

enabled and supported by her teacher and by her school. She was aware that her educational community would be supportive of her using a portion of her school days to pursue this project and that a variety of resources would be made available to her. The point is not whether or not Melanie *could have* completed this project on her own, the point is that she *did not have to do so*. Now, imagine a school without any children like Melanie, or without any programs that allow children to develop and carry out ideas to make the world a better place. If Melanie had gone to such a school, the other children would still be mocking Tony, and he would still be the sad young student on the bus.

### **A Brief Look at Education for Affective Development in America**

Socrates once asked, “Can virtue be taught?” Among today’s educational experts there is general agreement that virtues can be learned. American school policy makers continue to debate which values should be taught and disagree widely on the best way to teach them.

Since colonial times, affective, or character development as it has frequently been referred to, has been a facet of American school learning. John Dewey’s early influence on the American education system provided some of the philosophical basis for character education in today’s schools. It was Dewey’s belief that “. . . moral education in school is practically hopeless when we set up the development of character as its supreme end” (Dewey, 1916, p. 354). Instead, Dewey believed that character education should enable students to learn how to act, so that in any situation they will behave morally. Research conducted by Hartshorne and May in the 1930s supported Dewey’s aversion to the direct teaching of character education and found that participation in character education in school had little effect on moral conduct (Leming, 1993). More recent research has found a greater correlation between character education participation and moral conduct (Rushton, Brainerd, & Pressley, 1983; Wynne, 1989).

Kohlberg’s cognitive-developmental theory provides a framework of the moral development process from birth through adulthood (Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971). A series of six stages organized into three levels provide a sequence through which morality is developed. During progression through the preconventional level, one learns the consequences of one’s own actions. Rules and fairness govern actions. Development in the conventional level removes the focus from oneself to an emphasis on one’s place in society. Duties and social order govern actions as the individual learns the importance of having societal norms. The postconventional level of development marks a period in which the individual no longer accepts the imposition of law and establishes an ethical relativism for any given situation. In the 1970s, Lawrence Kohlberg (1975) connected his cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning to character education programming in schools.

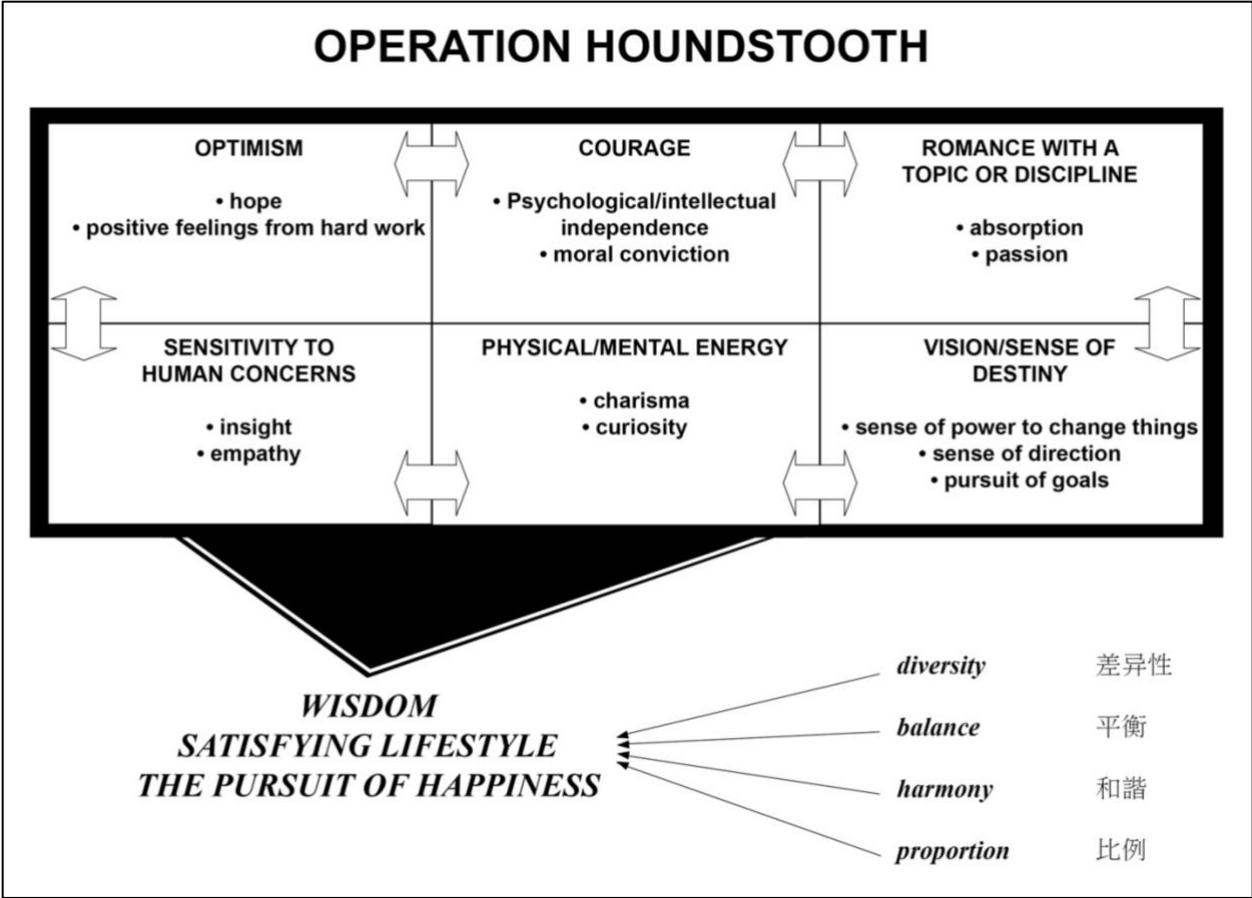
### **Operation Houndstooth**

One of the more fortunate directions in the social sciences in recent years has been the development of the positive psychology movement. Championed by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), this movement focuses on enhancing what is good in life in addition to fixing what is maladaptive. The goal of positive psychology is to create a science of human strengths that will help us to understand and learn how to foster socially constructive virtues in

young people. Although all of society's institutions need to be involved in helping to shape positive values and virtues, schools play an especially important part today due to the changes in family structures and because people of all ages now spend more than one fifth of their lives engaged in some kind of schooling. In a research study dealing with developing excellence in young people, Larson (2000) found that average students report being bored about one third of the time. He speculates that participation in civic and socially engaging activities might hold the key to overcoming the disengagement and disaffection that are rampant among American young people. He argues that components of positive development—for example, initiative, creativity, leadership, altruism, and civic engagement—can result from early and continuous opportunities to participate in experiences that promote characteristics associated with the production of social capital.

The positive psychology movement, coupled with our continuing fascination with the scientific components that give rise to socially constructive giftedness, has led us to examine the personal attributes that form the framework of a project called Operation Houndstooth—think of the interconnected “houndstooth” pattern that forms the background of the three-ring conception of giftedness (Renzulli, 1978). This theory argues that it is the interactive personality traits and environmental landscape that give rise to abilities, creativity, and task commitment. A comprehensive review of the literature and a series of Delphi technique classification studies led to the development of an organizational plan for studying the six components that make up this framework (Renzulli, 2002; Sytsma, 2003). These components are summarized in Figure 1 and briefly described below.

- *Optimism.* Optimism includes cognitive, emotional, and motivational components and reflects the belief that the future holds good outcomes. Optimism may be thought of as an attitude associated with expectations of a future that is socially desirable, to the individual's advantage, or to the advantage of others. It is characterized by a sense of hope and a willingness to accept hard work.
- *Courage.* Courage is the ability to face difficulty or danger while overcoming physical, psychological, or moral fears. Integrity and strength of character are typical manifestations of courage, and they represent the most salient marks of those creative people who actually increase social capital.
- *Romance with a topic or discipline.* When an individual is passionate about a topic or discipline, a true romance, characterized by powerful emotions and desires, evolves. The passion of this romance often becomes an image of the future in young people and provides the motivation for a long-term commitment to a course of action.
- *Sensitivity to human concerns.* This trait encompasses the abilities to comprehend another's affective world and to accurately and sensitively communicate such understanding through action. Altruism and empathy, aspects of which are evident throughout human development, characterize this trait.
- *Physical/mental energy.* All people have this trait in varying degrees, but the amount of energy an individual is willing and able to invest in the achievement of a goal is a crucial issue in high levels of accomplishment. In the case of eminent individuals, this energy investment is a major contributor to task commitment. Charisma and curiosity are frequent correlates of high physical and mental energy.



**Figure 1.** Graphic representation of Operation Houndstooth Theory

- *Vision/sense of destiny.* Complex and difficult to define, vision or a sense of destiny may be described best by a variety of interrelated concepts, such as internal locus of control, motivation, volition, and self-efficacy. When an individual has a vision or sense of destiny about future activities, events, and involvements, that vision serves to stimulate planning and to direct behavior; it becomes an incentive for present behavior.

Of course, many interactions take place between and among these six components. We will refer to these components as *co-cognitive factors* because they interact with and enhance the cognitive traits that we ordinarily associate with success in school and with the overall development of human abilities. The literature reviewing the empirical research that resulted in the identification of these components can be found by visiting our website (<https://www.gifted.uconn.edu>). The first phase of our research included clarifying definitions and identifying, adapting, and constructing assessment procedures that have extended our understanding of the components, especially as they are exhibited by young people.

A major assumption underlying this project is that all the components defined in our background research are subject to modification. Thus, the second phase of the project consists of a series of experimental studies to determine how various school-related interventions can promote the types of behavior associated with each of the components. These interventions draw

upon existing and newly developed techniques that can be used within various school and extracurricular contexts.

### **Houndstooth Intervention Theory**

Our examination of co-cognitive factors that influence the development of abilities, creativity, and task commitment parallels a great deal of theory and research that has looked at other noncognitive concerns such as social and emotional development, the development of self-concept and self-efficacy, character development, and the development of attitudes and values. Untold numbers of studies have examined the effects of various programmatic approaches that influence these types of development in persons who have experienced a range of adjustment problems and within the contexts of promoting positive, beneficial adjustment in healthy individuals and groups. Such approaches include a wide range of therapies, individual and group counseling techniques, social and psychological experimental treatments, and a broad array of educational interventions. Because the focus of Operation Houndstooth draws upon the theory and direction established in the emerging field of positive psychology, and because our own interest is the constructive development of gifted behaviors, rather than healing maladaptive conditions, the research reviewed in this article generally focuses on school-related opportunities and alternatives for the development of positive changes in the generally healthy population of young people.

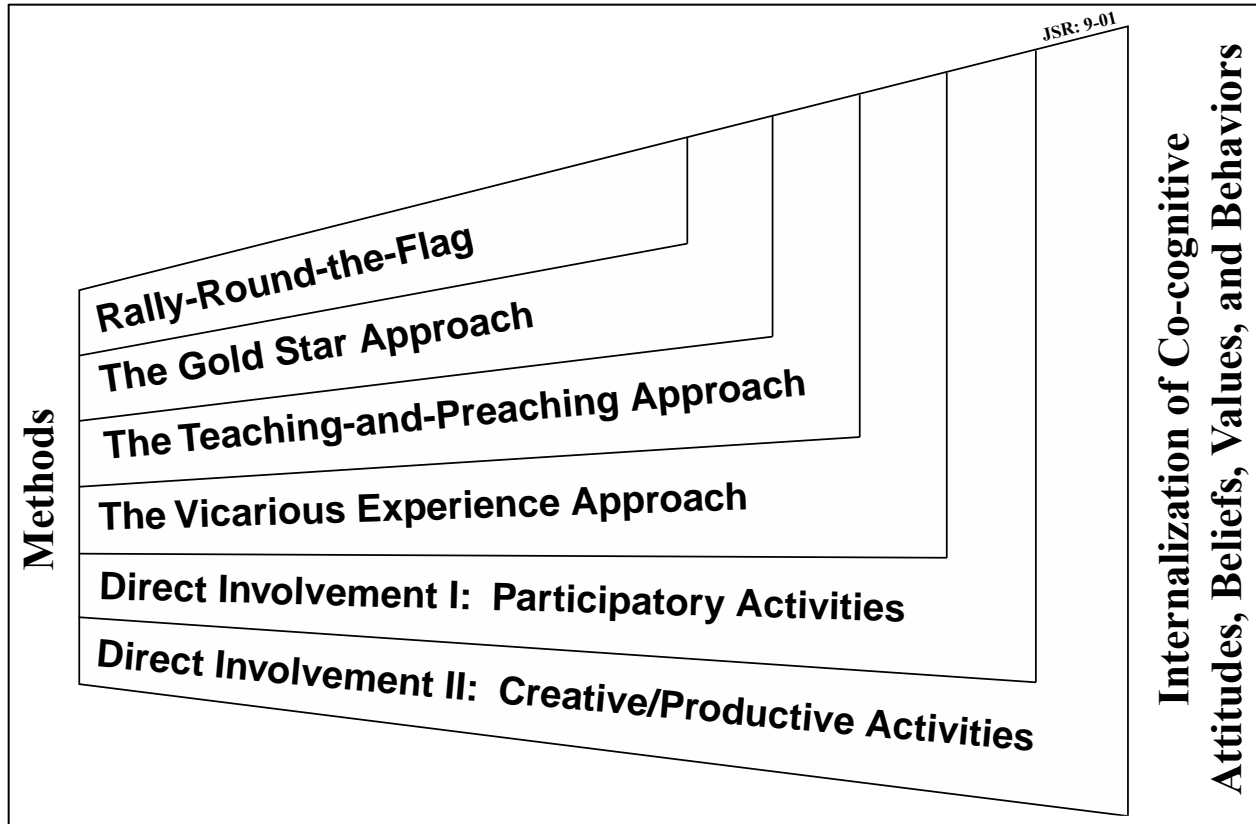
It is difficult to organize a categorical inventory of the large amount of information available on noncognitive approaches to positive development, because several recommended approaches range across what might form the parameters of discrete categories. We have, nevertheless, attempted to examine recommended practices and related research, paying particular attention to the most common characteristics of particular approaches. Based on literature reviews, we have divided these approaches into six areas, ranging from what research indicates are the least to the most powerful approaches for making strong attitudinal and behavioral changes in students (Vess & Halbur, 2003). Because one of our major concerns is the *internalization* of behaviors that eventually leads to the development of both a value system and the capacity to act upon positive characteristics, we have tended to view each category with an eye toward awareness versus a more deeply ingrained manifestation of certain values and behaviors. A graphic representation of Operation Houndstooth Intervention Theory is presented in Figure 2.

Before reviewing the six approaches included in Operation Houndstooth Intervention Theory, or OHIT, it is important to point out that each approach may contribute in varying degrees to positive growth. Although the earlier interventions in Figure 2 have less power to promote internalization, they may have value in a chain of experiences that maximizes the effect of each individual level of intervention.

### **The Rally-Round-the-Flag Approach**

This approach, sometimes referred to by others as “the cheer-leading method,” involves visual displays (posters, banners, bulletin boards) featuring certain values, slogans, or examples of virtuous behaviors. Also included are verbal slogans delivered over the schools’ public

address system or presented orally in classrooms and at assemblies. The rationale for this approach to promoting values, virtues, morality, and character development is that a steady regimen of affirmations and positive messages results in desirable beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in young people.



**Figure 2.** Operation Houndstooth Intervention Theory

In Tarkington School in Wheeling, IL, lists of behavioral and academic expectations are posted throughout the school (Murphy, 1998). These moral codes are known to students as Tarkington Tiger Traits. The traits exemplify desirable characteristics of citizenship. This approach is a simple beginning point for any school or teacher. We suggest getting students involved in the process by asking them to generate positive traits students should exhibit and making posters for display around the school. Together, students and teachers can decorate classrooms, hallways, or the entire school building with displays of characteristics they deem desirable.

### **The Gold Star Approach**

This approach is not unlike the ways in which we traditionally have rewarded students for good academic work. The approach makes use of techniques such as providing positive reinforcement through merit badges, placement on citizen-of-the-week lists, extolling good behavior at award assemblies or other events, and even having students earn points, gold stars, or other tokens that can be exchanged for prizes or privileges. Based on the learning theory of

classic behaviorism, the rationale underlying this approach is that positive reinforcement for desirable behaviors will increase the frequency of these behaviors. Although providing positive feedback for desirable behaviors may produce greater awareness about the issues under consideration, and even more desired behaviors in situations in which rewards may be earned, the importance of students' actions so far as internal beliefs and values are concerned may be of secondary consequence when compared to the award or reward being offered for good behavior.

One prevalent program that utilizes the Gold Star Approach is the Girl Scouts of America. The four program goals of the Girl Scouts are to develop self-potential, to relate to others, to develop values, and to contribute to society. Scouts are rewarded with pins, badges, patches, and awards in return for demonstrating desirable behaviors. More information about the Girl Scouts of America can be obtained on its website (see <https://www.girlscouts.org/en/discover/about-us/what-girl-scouts-do.html>). Research regarding the effectiveness of Girl Scouts is varied. Some studies claim that the program helps to enable moral development, while other studies question the efficacy of the program (Dubas & Snider, 1993; Smalt, 1996). However, nested in OHIT, the gold star approach is not an end within itself. As mentioned before, this approach is simply a systematic way to reward good behavior that can easily and creatively be implemented in classrooms.

### **The Teaching-and-Preaching Approach**

The direct teaching of noncognitive material is probably the most frequently used method to promote attitudes and behaviors related to character and value development. This approach resembles the kinds of training commonly used over the centuries in religious instruction and in situations in which allegiance to particular ideologies is the goal of persons responsible for the curriculum. The direct teaching approach spans a broad range of techniques ranging from recitation and drills about desirable beliefs and behaviors that require students to repeat back slogans or answer in prescribed ways ("What is meant by honesty?"), to dialogue, discussions, and debate about character—or value-laden issues. The direct teaching approach might include discussions based on fiction, films and videos, or examinations of personal characteristics or decision points by noteworthy persons portrayed in biographies, autobiographies, or other nonfiction genres. Biographical accounts from Lewis' (1992) book, *Kids With Courage*, for example, could be used with students as young as third grade as springboards into discussions on the roles kids can play in making positive societal change. Similarly, Gudeman's (1988) book, *Learning From the Lives of Amazing People* includes biographies, bibliographies, and activities kids can use to explore the lives of people who have made positive contributions to society. Lewis' 1998 book, *What Do You Stand For?*, includes character dilemmas, websites, and other activities students and teachers can use to explore character trait development.

One example of a teaching-and-preaching approach is a program such as Character Counts, which uses six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. The program was developed by the Josephson Institute (2004) and more information can be found on its website (see <https://charactercounts.org/character-counts-overview/six-pillars/>). Through lessons, students learn of historical figures who have exemplified each of these pillars of character. For example, when learning about citizenship, they will study Dorothea Dix, who pioneered better conditions for the mentally ill, and when learning about

trustworthiness, they will study Pat Tillman, who sacrificed millions of dollars when he left the NFL to join the U.S. Army after the attacks on America in September of 2001. Through learning about these heroes and heroines (the program has an outline of 48 specific heroes and heroines), they will see examples of people who have embodied the six pillars of character. Ideally, the students will then want to emulate the behaviors of these people. Programs such as Character Counts are frequently used in America today. Schools and teachers don't have to prescribe to such didactic programs, however, to effectively engage students in the teaching-and-preaching approach. As mentioned above, teachers can use films or books to elicit questions and issues related to character development.

### **The Vicarious Experience Approach**

Often used as an extension of direct teaching, the vicarious experience approach places students in situations in which they are expected to experience a particular personal or emotional reaction to situations in which a specified noncognitive goal is being pursued. Role-playing, dramatization, and simulations of significant or critical incidents are examples of the vicarious experience approach. Nucci (1987) states higher levels of moral reasoning can be fostered through the use of dilemma discussions in classrooms. The rationale underlying this approach is that deep and enduring effects on attitudes, values, or character must be experienced at a more active and participatory level than merely through a student's general awareness or direct teaching approaches.

The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, an organization based at Santa Clara University, provides a character education program entitled Character-Based Literacy. In this program, students study plays, poems, and novels. These literary works are used initially to teach reading and writing. Then students critically discuss the characters in the literature, often trying to place themselves in the situation or environment of the character in order to reflect on and internalize values such as integrity, self-control, and respect. Units include themes of responsibility, self-direction, self-control, respect, integrity, moderation, and justice. This approach is very similar to its precursor, teaching-and-preaching, but it seeks to more highly internalize the values by asking students to take on the role of the character (Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, 2003).

A great variety of books is available for teachers to use in their classrooms. We recommend:

- *Walk in Their Shoes: Character Education Through Literature* (Polette, 1999) introduces students to the teachings of Mohandas Gandhi and Aesop's Fables and the character traits that each try to internalize through lessons intended to make students think critically about what they would have done in that situation.
- *Fairy Tales on Trial* (Werman, 1999) and "*Advanced*" *Fairy Tales on Trial* (Werman, 2000) allow students to place themselves into the situation of a fairy tale character who must make a judgment of some kind. In one simulation, students are given a police report, a hospital report, and a grand jury investigation report all related to the story of the three Billy Goats Gruff. Students must triangulate the facts and learn to develop a critical eye in discerning fact from opinion. Students then engage in the trial of the Gruffs vs. the Troll.



## **Direct Involvement I**

Many people believe that the best way to internalize noncognitive characteristics is to provide young people with experiences in which they come into direct contact with situations and events where affective behaviors are taking place. Community service, internships with provisions for helping others or remediating injurious events, and participation in events where social or political action is being formulated or taking place are examples of this type of direct involvement.

According to the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2003), 29.5% of teenagers engaged in some type of volunteer activity in 2003. Increased emphasis on volunteerism in schools may be a contributing factor in this trend, as many schools now require their students to volunteer at local organizations. Volunteering exposes students to situations and experiences that they may not have been exposed to previously, and thus raises their awareness about local, national, and global issues. While promoting this exposure may help students gain perspective on their own situation and introduce them to service organizations, it may not help them internalize the co-cognitive factors if it is a forced requirement rather than an involvement based on a personalized commitment on the parts of students. It is only when students themselves initiate and carry out social action projects, as in Direct Involvement II, that we can see evidence of the internalization of the co-cognitive factors and witness the creative production of social capital. The main difference, then, between these two approaches is that Direct Involvement II experiences are student-initiated.

## **Direct Involvement II**

This type of direct involvement consists of situations in which young people take on *active leadership roles* to bring about positive social, educational, environmental, or political change, especially change that promotes justice, peace, or more harmonious relations between individuals and groups. In most instances, the fact that a young person has made a personal commitment to pursue a change-oriented course of action means that certain positive attitudes or values are already present, but utilizing the values or character traits in a real-world solution to a problem helps to solidify and deepen the commitment to particular beliefs. A deep internalization of positive attitudes and attendant behaviors will have a more enduring influence on developing wisdom, a satisfying lifestyle, and a lifelong value system than quick-fix behavioral changes that may result from experiences that do not culminate in action-oriented involvement.

In 2000, Stacey Hillman read in a magazine that police dogs were in need of bulletproof and stab resistant vests (ICGate Inc., 2004). Stacy, then 10 years old, decided that she could help by raising money. She began by approaching the local police chief to tell him her plan. She placed a picture of her with a police dog on collection bottles and put them in vet's offices and pet stores to collect donations. Today, Stacy is the president of the charity Pennies to Protect Police Dogs. Read more about Stacy at the Pennies to Protect Police Dogs website (*organization has since ceased operation*).

As the intervention approaches have escalated in the degree to which students participate, the skills necessary to complete such projects must also escalate. Therefore, resources such as

*The Kid's Guide to Social Action* (Lewis, 1991) prove invaluable tools for teaching “just in time” information for kids involved in projects that require skills not yet taught in the curriculum. Such resources can enable students to communicate their mission through letter writing, petition writing, and interviewing. Students just getting started might try *The Kid's Guide to Service Projects*, also by Lewis (1995), to find interesting project ideas. Renzulli Learning System (2005) also contains resources and materials for students and teachers to engage in such projects. Although many students like Stacy currently attend today’s public schools, most teachers are unlikely to recognize students’ potential for promoting social capital due to the absence of Direct Involvement II opportunities.

### **Adding It All Up**

The internalization of co-cognitive attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors cannot be achieved through any one of these interventions alone. Schools should adopt several approaches. If our goal is to move more students toward initiating action and promoting social capital, then our schools need to provide them with more opportunities to achieve higher levels of social engagement. School environments that intend to foster the production of social capital should offer students experiences at every stage of the Operation Houndstooth Intervention Theory including Direct Involvement I and II opportunities. Such schools may even allow students to “buy” time to work on such projects by documenting concepts students have previously mastered and compacting the curriculum using a tool such as the Curriculum Compactor (see Figure 3, for more information on compacting the curriculum, see Reis, Burns, & Renzulli, 1992). Once a school is able to establish an environment that fosters social action projects, students will begin to recognize that they are capable of being agents of societal change.

The progression of individuals through the levels of the Houndstooth Intervention mirrors the progression through Kohlberg’s stages of moral development. At any stage, one can understand all stages up to their current level of involvement, but can only be influenced by their current stage of moral development. As a basis for moral development, rules are placed upon young people both in societies and schools, and intervention approaches such as rally-round-the-flag, the gold star approach, and the teaching-and-preaching approach are effective for students at the preconventional stage of Kohlberg’s theory. Designed to develop empathy through participatory experiences, the vicarious experience approach, as well as Direct Involvement I are more appropriate methods for use with students who have reached the conventional level. It is during this stage that students gain an understanding of their place in society according to societal norms. Reaching the level of postconventional thought allows students to examine societal rules in order to establish their own moral relativism. Prior to this stage, students are unable to take a critical view of ethical principles and simply accept the standards with which they are presented. The Direct Involvement II intervention is most effective for students at the postconventional level because it enables them to evaluate and resolve societal deficits.

Progression through the stages is not guaranteed, and Kohlberg (1978) reports that only 20% of the adult population will reach the postconventional stage of thinking. Progression necessitates continued exposure to advanced stages of moral reasoning. Schools have the potential to promote internalization of the co-cognitive factors needed to progress toward postconventional thought if they are able to extend experiences at all levels of the Houndstooth

Intervention to students. This is necessary because social capital can only be enhanced by members of society who have achieved the postconventional level.

<b>INDIVIDUAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING GUIDE</b>		
<b>The Compactor</b>		
<small>Prepared by: Joseph S. Renzulli Linda M. Smith</small>		
NAME _____	AGE _____ TEACHER(S) _____	Individual Conference Dates And Persons Participating in Planning Of IEP
SCHOOL _____	GRADE _____ PARENT(S) _____	
<u>CURRICULUM AREAS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR COMPACTING</u> Provide a brief description of basic material to be covered during this marking period and the assessment information or evidence that suggests the need for compacting.	<u>PROCEDURES FOR COMPACTING BASIC MATERIAL</u> Describe activities that will be used to guarantee proficiency in basic curricular areas.	<u>ACCELERATION AND/OR ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES</u> Describe activities that will be used to provide advanced level learning experiences in each area of the regular curriculum.
<input type="checkbox"/> Check here if additional information is recorded on the reverse side.		<small>Copyright © 1978 by Creative Learning Press, Inc. P.O. Box 320 Mansfield Center, CT 06250. All rights reserved.</small>

**Figure 3.** Curriculum compactor form

### Conclusion

The goal of Operation Houndstooth is to develop in students the six co-cognitive factors mentioned previously: optimism, courage, romance with a topic/discipline, sensitivity to human concerns, physical/mental energy, and vision/sense of destiny. These are traits that many gifted students already exhibit, and may adopt quickly. Each level of the Houndstooth Intervention Theory leads students closer to the constructive development of gifted behaviors and the internalization of the co-cognitive factors. Students like Stacy and Melanie have become creative producers at the highest level of the Houndstooth Intervention Theory by internalizing a combination of the six co-cognitive traits. By employing this intervention, schools will encourage a new generation of students to use their gifts in socially constructive ways and seek ways to improve the lives of others rather than merely using their talents for economic gain, self-indulgence, and the exercise of power without a commitment to contribute to the improvement of life and resources on the planet.

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