

# Tracy L. Cross: An Overview of His Creative Leadership in the Field of Gifted Education

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Some prominent scholars in academia establish name recognition by publishing a large collection of peer-reviewed articles that simply accumulate impressive scores in the popular publishing metrics but don't really push their fields in positive directions. Some others make an impact with one big idea that goes viral. We probably could count on one hand the number that exert positive influences throughout all dimensions of a field (theory, research, practice, philosophy) by creating a massive collection of influential publications and presentations; plus an impressive array of leadership initiatives carried out through multiple, high-profile roles in an array of organizations and institutions; plus an equally impressive collection of projects that make a difference at the ground level where professionals do their practical work. I can think of just a few scholarly giants who have accomplished something along these lines throughout the course of their careers. And those few don't just come from education or psychology, which are the knowledge bases most influential in gifted education. I do interdisciplinary work, so I get to see the accomplishments of prominent scholars in 30+ academic disciplines and professional fields. Based on this expansive, interdisciplinary, international survey of fields I can say with confidence that Tracy Cross is one of those few difference-making scholarly giants that we counted on one hand.

Tracy's creative work in the field of gifted education always reminds me of Robert Sternberg's WICS construct (wisdom,

intelligence, and creativity synthesized). Sternberg, an eminent psychologist and scholar of creative intelligence, uses WICS to illustrate the importance of analyzing the influence of work in a field, and in the world. Those who are simpleminded and/or dogmatic don't employ wisdom, intelligence, or creativity in their decision making and practical work. Those who are intelligent but not wise or creative can do proficient but excessively mechanistic work that doesn't make much impact. Those who are creative but not intelligent or wise can come up with unusual ideas, but the lack of practical intelligence prevents them from making progress, and if they do make any sort of impact it could be harmful due to the lack of wisdom. Those who are creative and intelligent but not wise can make a powerful impact in the world, but that impact can be devastatingly harmful, as in the example of the creatively designed, intelligently refined, deceptive financial instruments that strongly contributed to the 2008 economic collapse. The very few who synthesize wisdom, intelligence, and creativity can do high-impact, extremely beneficial work in the world. Whenever I am asked about the WICS construct I usually respond by employing Tracy Cross as an excellent example. He is exceptionally creative in his scholarly writing and practical leadership initiatives. He comes up with new ways to shape the minds of scholars and practitioners while creatively and intelligently initiating practical, ethical work in the field. The ethics (a strong element of the W in WICS) arises from his keen sense of fairness, empathy, and compassion.

Here are just a few details that illustrate Tracy's wise and creatively intelligent impact on gifted education, and the world:

### ***Wise, intelligent, creative institutional leadership***

- Endowed chair, College of William and Mary and Executive Director of the Institute for Research on the Suicide of Gifted Students; director of two doctoral programs at the college.
- Prior, major leadership roles and projects at Ball State University including another endowed chair, and founding/directing a doctoral program and an Institute for research on the psychology of gifted students. Prior to those positions Tracy served in other leadership roles including department chair, coordinator of research, program director, director of research grants, and more.
- Leadership of the field of gifted education as president of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC); The Association for the Gifted, Council for Exceptional Children.
- Promoting awareness of various dimensions of giftedness and talent around the world, including large-scale projects in locations such as Ireland and Saudi Arabia.
- In short, I've never come across anyone else in academia with such an extensive track record of exemplary leadership.

### ***Outstanding scholarship***

- Referring back to the aforementioned difficulty finding prominent scholars whose impressive track records are similar to Tracy, it would be very difficult to find any who have his journal editing track record. Tracy has edited most of the academic research journals relevant to the field of gifted education. Moreover, his style of editing has served as a beacon of light on the horizon for other journal editors to use as inspiration, myself included.
- His publication record is massive, including a large number of important, groundbreaking, peer-reviewed articles published in a wide array of top-flight journals; multiple books that push the field in important new directions (e.g., expanding awareness of social and emotional development and issues); many chapters in widely known anthologies; and columns published in practitioner outlets, which magnify his impact on the practical work in the field. As a journal editor I can attest to the impact of his work in other ways, notably when his name keeps popping up in articles submitted for publication through various journals.
- Tracy also has been very active in the development and completion of large-scale, grant-funded research projects.
- Rounding out his impressive scholarly record is an extensive collection of presentations he has carried out in state, regional, national, and international conference venues. I've had the pleasure of attending many of his presentations so I can attest to the strong connection he establishes with his audiences through a synthesis of his powerful intellect, natural humility, and sense of humor.

### ***Frequent recognition from other leaders in the field***

- Another signifier of his influence is the large collection of honors and awards he has earned from Mensa, the National Association for Gifted Children, various state associations for the gifted, and several universities that benefited from his work as a faculty member and administrator. The awards are far too many to mention here but a few of them establish a vision of his excellence – the distinguished scholar award, and the distinguished service award from the NAGC; the award for excellence in research, and the lifetime achievement award from MENSA.

I have to stop at this point because I don't want this overview to become a dissertation-length document. There are so many other things that could be mentioned as evidence of Tracy's WICS work in the field of gifted education. An accurate way to summarize the overview is to say that the world would be a much better place if somehow Tracy Cross could be replicated, with the replicants spreading out into all nations throughout the world taking on creative leadership roles in academia and in societies.