



## **Developing Multiple Talents**

### **The personal side of creative expression**

By Douglas Eby

[ PDF / Kindle / Paperback ]

### **Sample excerpt from the book**

[ See ordering links at end. ]

## Introduction

*"I want to do wardrobe. I want to do hair. I want to do makeup...writing...directing...producing. I want to do all of it. I like it."*  
Abigail Breslin

Many people share an enthusiasm for exploring and expressing multiple creative talents and passions, often from a very young age. The dynamic complexity of creative abilities in multitalented people is a huge field of study - I have been researching and writing on aspects of creativity and high ability for more than twenty years.

My hope is that you find material in this brief overview to be of interest and value in pointing toward areas to more deeply explore, to help you more fully realize your own abilities.

The cover image - [Digital Color Wheel](#) - by Frank Bonilla (used under a Creative Commons license) - reminds me of the complexity and interaction of creative talents, and also of stained glass Rose windows in Gothic Cathedrals, which I find powerful and visually exciting.

My series of websites, columns and articles - and now this book - have grown out of my graduate studies in psychology, and personal research to better understand my own social, emotional, personal development and achievement challenges, and to publish material that might help other people as well.

The kinds of questions I was exploring when I began this research in college (decades ago) and created my main site Talent Development Resources more than ten years ago, continue to interest and challenge me (and of course many other people) - topics like:

*Why did I feel and think so differently from mainstream culture?*

*Why haven't I ever "settled down" into a specific career?*

*Why am I so sensitive to outer sensations and my own inner world?*

*Why have I been so self-critical?*

*What makes me and so many creative people vulnerable to dark moods like depression and anxiety at times?*

*How can I increase my satisfaction and emotional reward from what I am doing with my life?*

*What does research say about enhancing creative expression?*

There are many areas of psychology and other fields which I continue to explore related to those questions – such as positive psychology and happiness research, high sensitivity, mood and creativity, mental health, creative motivation, being an entrepreneur, self concept and achievement – and other topics, many of which are at least briefly covered in this book.

I have never had the sense of being on a career path - Barbara Sher writes about many people being "Scanners" (see the Work - Career chapter) - but I have had rich experiences in many interesting (and many not so interesting) jobs, including glue testing in a chemical company lab; collecting beach sand for a marine zoologist; growing bread mold at CalTech for a geneticist; working as an assistant for a psychiatrist doing some of the early left-right brain research; repairing woodwind instruments; operating computer-controlled visual effects motion picture cameras, and working as a psychology counselor with depressed or addicted people.

Along the way, I've also done some photography, and acting in community theater plays, and as a movie extra. I've also led support groups for gifted women.

*"All creative people have multiple talents, don't they?"*

In his post [Creatives With Multiple Talents](#) (on his blog [The Artist's Road](#)), Patrick Ross writes about meeting two students in a Masters in Writing program who are about to graduate.

"They told me about a talent show their class held at their last on-campus residency. One of them said he had performed on the violin.

"The other told me he has acting experience but didn't want to do a one-man show, so he performed magic tricks. I said it was interesting that all of these writing students had another talent they could perform. The violin player looked at me as if I had just expressed bafflement that an orange was the color orange. 'All creative people have multiple talents, don't they?'

"They do, scientists tell us, even if they don't realize it," Ross adds. "After all, if you've never picked up a musical instrument, you may not realize you have a predisposition to excel at it. But the creative brain knows how to both master a skill and think in ways others would find counter-intuitive to breathe new life into that skill."

## **Examples of multitalented people**

The opening quote by Abigail Breslin is a sample of many people who are passionately interested and ambitious from childhood. The young actress has a number of movie credits including her endearing role in "Little Miss Sunshine." Now about age 14, she has time to pursue her varied interests, and I look forward to seeing more of her dynamic work. [The undated quote is from imdb.com - the Internet Movie Database - a great source of information on movie projects and people.]

Arts and entertainment fields attract many creatively multitalented people - perhaps especially filmmaking. A number of well-known actors, for example, create projects outside of acting. Creativity researcher James C. Kaufman, Ph.D. uses a term I like for people having such multiple passions and abilities: creative polymathy. See more in the last chapter. Here are a few examples of well-known people that you may

find interesting and even inspiring. But I also offer a warning: Just because we don't match some of these people in terms of achievement, doesn't mean we are not in fact multitalented. There are many issues and influences affecting how fully we can realize our abilities. That's one of the points of this book.

**Julia Cameron** is well-known as the author of *The Artist's Way*, and has been a writer since the age of eighteen, creating short stories, essays and political journalism articles, and more than thirty books including a crime novel plus volumes of children's poems and prayers. She is also an award-winning poet and playwright, with extensive film and theater credits, including writing an episode of the TV show *Miami Vice*, and writer and director of the movie *God's Will*. She collaborated with her former husband Martin Scorsese on three films. For her musicals, Cameron serves as composer as well as libretto-writer and lyricist. She has a quote on her site [www.theartistsway.com](http://www.theartistsway.com) that I really appreciate: "Most of us have no idea of our real creative height. We are much more gifted than we know."

**Jamie Lee Curtis** has written a number of children's books. **Jane Seymour** is author of several books and art kits, and is an accomplished and widely published painter. **Bryce Dallas Howard** has credits as a vocalist for a movie soundtrack, for musical production, and as a producer, screenwriter and director.

Before graduating from Harvard with a psychology degree, **Natalie Portman** was credited as a research assistant to Alan Dershowitz and was co-author of a study on memory called "Frontal Lobe Activation During Object Permanence" that was published in a scientific journal.

**James Franco** was enrolled in Yale University's English PhD program, and has earned a master's degree from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and Columbia University's MFA writing programs.

**Jeff Bridges**, 61, an Oscar winner for his acting, will release his first music album, a 10-song collection called "Jeff Bridges." He comments, "People like to put things in a box — and they do that with their own lives too, they limit things — but it's all art to me...all art is truth. People try to define things and make it easier for their mind to digest things, I guess. But music has been part of my life since I was a kid. Music meant more to me when I was young, but I went into acting because of family and because it was the path of least resistance." He added, "So many actors play music, and so many musicians want to act." [From "Jeff Bridges plays to his musician side," By Geoff Boucher, Los Angeles Times, August 15, 2011.]

**Gordon Parks** (1912-2006) was often referred to as a renaissance man, as noted in an obituary by Dennis McLellan [Los Angeles Times March 8, 2006], and lived up to the label: "In addition to his photography, film work and poetry, he composed a symphony, sonatas, concertos, film scores, and wrote novels, instructional photography manuals, essays and three memoirs. He received numerous honors over the years, including the National Medal of Arts from President Reagan. He was a high school dropout."

In my Creative Mind post [Amber Benson on Writing: Creating is Kind of Intoxicating](#), I wrote about the actor (she played 'Tara' on "Buffy the Vampire Slayer") who also has multiple credits as a novelist and screenwriter, director and producer.

Another example is **Viggo Mortensen**, well-known for his acting in the *The Lord of the Rings* movies and many others, including *Eastern Promises*, and *The Road*. He

portrays Sigmund Freud in the upcoming movie *A Dangerous Method*. In addition to acting, his creative pursuits include painting, photography, poetry, music, plus spoken-word recordings. In 2002, he founded Perceval Press to publish the works of his and other artists and authors.

He once commented: "Photography, painting or poetry - those are just extensions of me, how I perceive things, they are my way of communicating." (imdb.com) He has made other comments that also relate to topics in this book, such as these:

"If I don't get a little time by myself every day, it makes me uncomfortable. I really need that. Even if it's a minute or two. I think it was Robert Louis Stevenson who said this. It was about meandering through a career, or the arts in general, without seeming to have a deliberate plan. He said, 'To travel hopefully is better than to arrive, and the true success is in the labor.' That's a great line, 'To travel hopefully.' That's what I'd like to do. People who are creators create. People say to me all the time, 'Why don't you just focus on one thing?' And I say, 'Why? Why just one thing? Why can't I do more? Who makes up these rules?'" [From the site "Viggo Mortenson: Movies to Art to Politics" [www.breggo.net](http://www.breggo.net)]

A profile says he "Speaks fluent English, Spanish, Danish, and French, but he also speaks Swedish and Norwegian reasonably well." [imdb.com]

Many highly creative people are uncommonly intelligent - but intellect and creativity are not the same ability, of course, nor do they always go with each other. But I will cover more about that below.

## **An Exploration**

This is not designed as a how-to or self-help book, so much as an overview of some of the key aspects of our personality and inner life that can affect how well we understand, access and express our different creative talents - and be able to do much more than one thing.

Along the way, though, there are suggestions by coaches, psychologists and others on strategies to help you explore more topics, and more fully realize your talents.

The chapters here are "headlines" about a variety of inter-related subjects, with brief summaries of topics, plus quotes by creative people and some excerpts from research studies, as well as links to additional resources.

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## **INTELLIGENCE**

One form of talent is obviously cognitive ability. How does that relate to other forms, such as creative ability? In the fields of writing and filmmaking, for example, there are many examples of prominent achievers who are highly intelligent, with or without academic credentials; but there are also many very creative and productive people without uncommon intellect.

## **Multiple Intelligences / Multiple Talents**

Educator Howard Gardner of Harvard articulated his ideas of Multiple Intelligences in several books including [Frames of Mind](#).

In his article [Reframing the Mind](#), Daniel T. Willingham (a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia) noted a number of intelligence researchers have discussed various human abilities, including aesthetic, athletic, musical, and so on, and "called them talents or abilities, whereas Gardner has renamed them intelligences."

He notes that Gardner thinks people possess at least eight independent types of intelligence, and provides this list of definitions, with examples Gardner has provided of professions that draw heavily on that particular intelligence:

- Linguistic: facility with verbal materials (writer, attorney).
- Logico-mathematical: the ability to use logical methods and to solve mathematical problems (mathematician, scientist).
- Spatial: the ability to use and manipulate space (sculptor, architect).
- Musical: the ability to create, perform, and appreciate music (performer, composer).
- Bodily-kinesthetic: the ability to use one's body (athlete, dancer).
- Interpersonal: the ability to understand others' needs, intentions, and motivations (salesperson, politician).
- Intrapersonal: the ability to understand one's own motivations and emotions (novelist, therapist with self-insight).
- Naturalist: the ability to recognize, identify, and classify flora and fauna or other classes of objects (naturalist, cook).

According to Prof. Willingham, "Gardner claims that everyone has all eight intelligences to some degree, but each individual has his or her own pattern of stronger and weaker intelligences. Gardner also argues that most tasks require more than one intelligence working together."

### ***Isn't that true for multi-talented people in general?***

A neurobiologist or actor may also have high levels of other talents or "intelligences" and make use of them in their profession - or not.

Maybe they paint or write short stories "on the side" and never publish, but they are still multi-talented.

### **Do we need a high IQ to be creative?**

Creativity researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, PhD (pronounced me-high chick-sent-me-high) explains in his article [The Creative Personality: Ten paradoxical traits of the creative personality](#) (from his book *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*) that "Creative people tend to be smart yet naive at the same time."

He says that "a core of general intelligence is high among people who make important creative contributions," but according to the studies of Lewis Terman, "after a certain point IQ does not seem to be correlated with superior performance in real life" – including level of creative expression.

Csikszentmihalyi notes that Howard Gardner "remarked in his study of the major creative geniuses of this century, a certain immaturity, both emotional and mental, can go hand in hand with deepest insights."

Gardner's book is [Creating Minds: An Anatomy of Creativity as Seen Through the Lives of Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham, and Gandhi](#).

### **High intelligence and ability can include high challenges.**

One of the themes I have noticed in the research on talent and creativity is that having so-called advanced potential, or being multitalented, does not confer any guarantee of success on any level, or any kind of "automatic" fulfillment of those abilities.

For example, Sally M. Reis, PhD of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, notes in an article of hers ([Internal barriers, personal issues, and decisions faced by gifted and talented females](#)) that high potential and multiple interests, multipotentiality, can benefit many women, but others "often cannot find their niche, make it on their own, or choose a vocational path."

That can apply to us men as well, of course.

Also see my article [Is Intellect an Albatross?](#) in which I explore the question of whether an exceptional mind has potential negative consequences, particularly for women.

In her Foreword to the book "Enjoying the Gift of Being Uncommon" by Willem Kuipers, Linda Silverman, PhD (Director of the Gifted Development Center) notes, "The vast majority of gifted adults are never identified. Even those who were tested as children and placed in gifted programs often believe that their giftedness disappeared by the time they reached adulthood.

"It does not seem to matter how much success a person achieves—hardly anyone is comfortable saying, 'I'm gifted.' That is why this book is such a major breakthrough."

She continues, "Willem Kuipers bypasses the problem by coining a much more palatable term: eXtra intelligent (Xi). And, if someone has a knee-jerk reaction to that idea, Xi can also stand for eXtra intense. More people are aware of and admit to their intensity than to their uncommon intelligence.

"Parents note the intensity of their young child before they realize that their child is developing at a faster rate. High intensity is a close cousin to high intelligence."

Read more quotes and info about the book in my High Ability site post [The Gift of Being Uncommon](#).

***It may be helpful to look at your own ideas about intelligence and ability.***

There is a lot of cultural influence about what constitutes ability and multiple talents - such as the endless media repetition of the "usual suspects" in the role model pantheon of exceptional achievers. So, if you aren't as adept or accomplished or well-known as Mozart, Einstein or Georgia O'Keeffe, Bill Gates, Lady Gaga or Meryl Streep, you may tend to think you aren't "really" talented.

*{ Continued in the book. }*

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## **INSPIRATION - PASSION**

One of the most widely circulated quotes on passion and personal development is this one by author and mythologist Joseph Campbell: "When you follow your bliss... doors will open where you would not have thought there would be doors; and where there wouldn't be a door for anyone else."

That may be a bit new-agey for my taste, but I still like it, especially if I interpret "doors" as inner perception, rather than simply external opportunities.

Campbell also said, "To find your own way is to follow your bliss. This involves analysis, watching yourself and seeing where real deep bliss is -- not the quick little excitement, but the real deep, life-filling bliss."

That can be a life-long exploration, of course - especially for multitalented people - and your 'blisses' may change over time, even radically - including your vocational interests. See the chapter on Work - Career and Barbara Sher's ideas on being a Scanner. Reading about people with passionate serial interests - 'Scanners' - who may not fit into mainstream occupational roles has been very enlightening and affirming for me; one form of criticizing myself has been to wonder if I'm too 'crazy' to stick with an interest or job, then feel shame because so many people, even exceptional ones, do seem able to find and pursue a 'niche' in life.

### **Michelangelo as a role model**

"Many people die with their music still in them. Why is this so? Too often it is because they are always getting ready to live. Before they know it, time runs out." – Oliver Wendell Holmes

The book [The Michelangelo Method](#) promises to use the Italian Renaissance painter, sculptor, architect, poet and engineer as a model for gaining insight into our own creative life, and releasing our music – our potential talents.

Here is a section from the book that talks about some of the feelings we may experience - such as regret - over not realizing our talents, and how we may think of our

talents or gifts. It's a long excerpt, because I think it refers to a number of important topics, such as identifying ourselves as gifted or exceptional.

"Susan worked as a legal assistant for a major law firm. Her daughter, 'the flower from my compost heap of a marriage' as she put it, had recently left for college on an academic scholarship. With her daughter launched, Susan was left to consider her own path. She looked down at the ground below her. 'Dull cement,' she said, 'and my feet were planted in it long before I had a chance to choose.' Susan wanted a change. She was dying for a change. But to what? She had no idea. And wasn't it too late already? After all, she was nearly 42.

"Susan couldn't think constructively. She believed that she had no choices. Here was a bright, articulate, capable woman who, in her own mind, could never do anything right and believed she had missed her chance anyway. Susan thought her life nothing more than a giant 'might have been.' If she hadn't married so young, she might have had a relationship she was happy with. If she hadn't gotten pregnant, she might have finished law school. If she had finished law school, she could have been the lawyer and not the legal assistant."

The book continues, "Susan couldn't figure out where to begin. Her early enchantment with the law had faded. She wanted a new life, and her greatest fear was, to paraphrase Oliver Wendell Holmes, that she might die with her music still in her. For Susan, it was time to start playing her own music. Working with a life coach, Susan asked, 'How do I find out what exactly to do? Can you tell me?' 'You have to find it within yourself,' the coach said. 'But I can start by asking you a few questions that will begin to reveal your gift.'

"'But I don't have a particular gift. I'm not gifted,' Susan said. "If you were to ask someone what their gift is, chances are their minds will immediately turn to Michelangelo sculpting his Pietà or Einstein unlocking the universe's secrets with a simple equation. People tend to think of gifts in such extraordinary terms. They see a gift as an innate, exceptional talent, as something that few people in this life are born with. But they are wrong.

"A gift isn't just the province of the exceptionally talented, the successful, or the blessed. Quite the contrary, everyone has a gift. Some gifts are thousand-watt bolts of light. Others are hidden in the stone. All are there, waiting to be revealed. Your gift lies in the place where your values, passions, and strengths meet. Discovering that place is the first step toward sculpting your masterpiece, your life."

Excerpt from "Finding Your Gift" By Ken Schuman and Ron Paxton (posted on Oprah.com) – from the book [The Michelangelo Method](#).

## **Developing creativity with passion**

Challenge may be an important part of creative expression and developing talents, and passion is part of the intrinsic motivation that keeps creators going in the face of challenges.

*{ Continued in the book. }*

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## **Developing Multiple Talents** **The personal side of creative expression**

By Douglas Eby

*From the back cover:*

“Part book about creativity, part compendium of useful tidbits, quotations and research, and part annotated bibliography, this is a wildly useful and highly entertaining resource.”

- Stephanie S. Tolan, fiction writer and consultant on the needs of the gifted.

“The book is kaleidoscopic, just like the subject he describes.”

- Willem Kuipers, counselor for extra intelligent people; author of the book *Enjoying the Gift of Being Uncommon*.

“Packed full of insights and resources for the creative life, this book offers new ways to thrive as a creative person. I highly recommend it as a resource for anyone who wants to understand the psychology behind our creative drive.”

- Cynthia Morris, Writing and creativity coach

“Douglas Eby does an extraordinary job of integrating complex characteristics into a complete overview of the multitasking personality.”

- Lisa A. Riley, MA, LMFT, Creativity coach, Family Therapist

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