

BEINE, JEFFREY R., Ph.D., December 2007

Educational Foundations and
Special Services

EVALUATING STERNBERG'S INVESTMENT THEORY OF CREATIVITY: ARE
INNOVATORS WIDELY-DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT THE PROFESSIONS
AND WHAT DO THEY HAVE IN COMMON? (184 pp.)

Director of the Dissertation: James Delisle, Ph.D.

This multiple case study attempted to investigate two basic research questions: (1) could qualitative evidence be found in support of Robert J. Sternberg's investment theory's assertion that creative thinkers are broadly distributed across all venues of human endeavor, not confined to those few fields typically studied by creativity researchers; and (2) did highly creative professionals innovating in diverse fields once share common traits as creative preadolescents? Simply put, what traits do a creative teacher, creative engineer, creative judge, creative web designer, creative social worker, creative banker, creative postal worker, creative community activist, and creative deputy have in common, and would such similarities conform to those traits predicted by Sternberg's investment theory?

Employing an interpretive case study design, this qualitative study featured extended interviews with nine creative professionals from dissimilar fields nominated by their peers or superiors for their consistent innovations. Thus this study appears to be the first independent field test examining the external validity of Sternberg's investment theory's premise that even though creative thinkers are widely-distributed throughout the

professions they still share a common set of personality characteristics and face similar social challenges as they seek to initiate change.

The results of this study yielded qualitative data supporting Sternberg's investment theory's prediction of shared traits by creative professionals innovating in diverse settings. The majority of cases supported five observed trends: consistent risk-taking, incubation techniques (employed to foster new ideas), personal adversity, professional passion, and empathy. Though not predicted by the investment theory, a surprisingly consistent theme of altruistic empathy was readily observed in a majority of the cases suggesting a possible moral component to the motivations of creative professionals innovating in real-world settings. Perhaps the unexpected emergence of altruistic empathy will lead to a new avenue of creativity research.