

21st WORLD CONFERENCE ON GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN

10-14 August 2015

EDUCATING GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN—TURNING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

By Jennifer Quamina, MPhil

Odense, Denmark was this year's host city for the 21st conference of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC), and what a beautiful city it is. The conference theme was "turning research into practice." I was privileged to attend and present my chapter from the International Gifted Education Teacher-Development Network (IGET-Network, LLC) new book, *Running the Long Race in Gifted Education: Narratives and Interviews from Culturally Diverse Gifted Adults* (co-editors, Scott-Carrol, PhD and Sparks, PhD).

The proceedings started on Sunday with a day dedicated to parents of gifted children. Parents from around the world were invited to focus groups and given practical advice from Dr. Shirley Kokot (South Africa), Dr. Julia I. Roberts (USA), Dr. Ole Kyed (Denmark), and Dr. Dorothy Sisk (USA), all world-renowned educators and educational psychologists.

Monday morning started with a half day of pre-conference workshops followed by the official opening ceremony. The first keynote speaker, Dr. Shirley Kokot, described her school for the gifted in South Africa. She spoke in detail on the challenges of recruiting, training, and retaining teachers with a unique way of engaging students. Her school prides itself on its pupil-led learning environment that brings the core curriculum to life. She also spoke on the rewards and triumphs of running the school. She explained how the children were physically and emotionally thriving in the nurturing environment she works hard to maintain. It sounds like a school I would have loved to attend as a child.

Other speakers

Tuesday was a full day of keynote speakers and parallel talk sessions. One keynote speaker, Dr. Margret Southerland, impressed me with her final words: She urged everyone in the room to be advocates for the gifted child and adult. As evidenced by the crowd's applause, this statement was warmly received.

I was intrigued by Dr. Henry Tirri's keynote speech, entitled "The Shift – Giftedness in the 21st Century." He shared with the audience a worldwide community of gifted individuals whose aim is to find sustainable solutions to worldwide problems. Together, they work on collaborative projects organised by international communities of gifted individuals within non-profit organisations. This concept, of bringing gifted people together in this manner, is excellent and should be duplicated.

The parallel sessions were divided by topic:

1. Advocating for the Gifted
2. Assessment, Screening and Identification
3. Creativity Research, Practice, and Future Trends
4. Curriculum and Classroom Practices – MANGLER
5. Developing Future Leaders
6. Educational Technology
7. Giftedness Theory, Research, Practice, and Future Trends
8. Guidance and Counselling
9. Home Schooling, Parenting, and Parent Matters
10. Innovation Education
11. Moral Education, Values, and Social Consciousness
12. Partnering Globally for Success
13. Social Emotional Needs of the Gifted, Creative, and Talented
14. Acceleration
15. Twice-Exceptional
16. Underachievers

British, Gifted, and Disabled: A Personal Narrative of Discovery and Acceptance, Chapter 8 in Running the Long Race in Gifted Education

My presentation came under the topic of advocating for the gifted. I discussed my journey of being both identified as gifted and diagnosed with a learning disability in adulthood. Growing up as twice exceptional, I had profound experiences in my childhood, good and bad. Writing the book chapter forced me into deep reflection on how I treated myself and others. In order to fully utilize my abilities as a gifted adult, I had to change my thinking and behaviour. I can only conclude that I'm deeply grateful for the immense challenges and blessings.

I attended as many parallel sessions on twice exceptionality as possible because I wanted more insight into the current research on being gifted while having a disability. I was very impressed, especially with the talks that focused on helping the social and emotional needs of twice exceptional children. I learnt that intervening and counselling gifted children earlier can help them better cope with the stress of living in a world that doesn't feel normal.

Science and Technology and Lego's

Soren Ragard, Director of Digital Experiences at Lego™ Education, also gave an enlightening keynote address. His company believes that hands-on digital and physical resources can bring novel creative experiences to students in areas of science and technology. The company also believe that creative thinkers can experiment with and design new innovative objects through Lego's digital software. I especially enjoyed the audience participation part, where each audience member was given a packet of Lego bricks and asked to create a bird, letting our imaginations go wild. It was great fun, and I'm sure students would thoroughly enjoy.

Conference Entertainment

The conference was brought to a close with a special show by the Hans Christian Andersen Parade. The show was amazing and got everyone clapping and singing along. I really enjoyed my week at the WCGTC Conference. I learnt so much about giftedness and met a number of gifted adults who made me feel welcome. They are my new friends.

We also watched a performance by the Royal Ballet School in Odense. The young dancers were exceptionally graceful and elegant. They brought a heart-warming smile to everyone in the audience

Assessment

Overall, I came away feeling inspired. I'm currently organising a book of narratives from twice exceptional adults and their life experiences. I think this collaboration will be valuable to the many twice exceptional learners who, like me, don't fit the typical gifted mould.

I have many people to thank who supported me in attending the conference, the first being Professor Joy Maria Scott-Carol for guiding my presentation and book chapter. I'd also like to thank the IGET Network for sponsoring me, Mr. Tyler Clark (WCGTC Executive Administrator) for his help at the conference venue, Ms. Tina Refning (conference chair) for her sterling work in organising the conference, and finally Dr. Monita Leavitt for her positive feedback and support while I was presenting.

WCGTC will host its 2017 conference in Australia (The University of New South Wales) on July 20th - 23rd, 2017. I recommend anyone interested in giftedness should put this date on their calendars.