The Challenge of Providing Gifted Education

Sharon Dole
Western Carolina University

Lisa Bloom
Western Carolina University

Welcome to this special issue of *Global Education Review* that explores gifted education. Although there is a lack of universal consensus on a definition of giftedness there is some agreement that giftedness involves multiple qualities, not just intellectual ones. Gifted education programs vary both among and within countries and who is served in these programs depends largely on the definitions used. The topics explored in this issue include perceptions and policies of gifted education in cultures and countries across the globe; the presumed dichotomy of equity and excellence in countries as different in ideologies as the United States and China; underrepresentation of culturally diverse students, a problem that has plagued the field for decades; gifted education in rural communities; and using a virtual environment for students to pose and share mathematical problems.

In the first article, *Global Dimensions of Gifted and Talented Education: The Influence of National Perceptions on Policies and Practices*, Brian L. Heuser, Ke Wang, and Salman Shahid compare perceptions and policies of giftedness and gifted and talented programs in diverse cultures and countries. In doing so, they discovered very different constructs of intelligence and ability. In their article, the authors make recommendations that address the challenges of gifted education globally; in particular the concept that gifted education increases social inequity.

Elissa Brown and Leigh Wishney continue the discussion of inequity in their article, *Equity and Excellence: Political Forces in the Education of Gifted Students in the United States and Abroad*. The authors present a history of the ambivalence demonstrated by the United States toward gifted education and compare it with a sample of countries including South Korea, Singapore, England, and Finland. They conclude with a discussion of how the needs of gifted students have not been met because of the way excellence and equity have been interpreted.

Exploring gifted education in the sociocultural context of China, Tian Fu also addresses equity and excellence in *Wandering in the Shadow of Egalitarianism and Equity: A Social and Cultural Explanation to the Underdeveloped Education in China*. The author describes how the long traditions of egalitarianism and socialism have hindered the development of gifted education in China. Fu concludes the article with recommendations on how gifted education should be framed in China and in other countries with similar ideologies.

Corresponding Author:
Sharon Dole, Western Carolina University, Killian 203C2
Cullowhee, NC 28723
Email: dole@email.wcu.edu

In *Ignorance or Indifference? Seeking Excellence and Equity for Under-Represented Students of Color in Gifted Education,* Wright, Ford and Young discuss the lack of access to gifted education, Advanced Placement courses and International Baccalaureate for students of color, especially those who are African American or Hispanic. The authors present data and describe factors commonly associated with underrepresentation such as deficit thinking. They make a compelling argument that the underrepresentation of students of color in programs for gifted students is the result of ignorance and indifference. They argue that ignorance can change with a desire to become knowledgeable yet is often used as a disguise for apathy, a perhaps more serious barrier when it comes to access issues. The authors call for increased accountability and intentional efforts to desegregate programs for gifted students and make recommendations for addressing ignorance and indifference, concepts that are paramount to solving the problem of underrepresentation of gifted learners of color and equity of access to appropriate programs.

In *Responding to the Challenges of Gifted Education in Rural Communities,* Anzano and Callahan describe issues of under identification of students from rural areas and their access to gifted programming. These authors describe an alternative process for identifying gifted students in rural areas that involved comparing students to local rather than national norms. They implemented a curriculum model that integrated place-based pedagogy and evidence-based practices and intervened to address both stereotype threat and mindset amongst participants. The authors present results of a year and half pilot using the identification process and curriculum model that helped increase the pool of students identified as gifted and engaged teachers in implementing the curriculum.

Finally, in *Differentiating Instruction Using a Virtual Environment: A Study of Mathematical Problem Posing Among Gifted and Talented Learners*, Manuel and Freiman discuss the challenge of meeting the needs of students who are mathematically gifted citing the lack of resources commonly associated with public schools. They describe an innovative project designed to provide enrichment to mathematically gifted students in the area of problem generation and problem solving. Their data indicate that students appreciated the opportunity for challenge. The authors make recommendations for providing enrichment in the area of math as well as implications for future research in the area of problem solving.

The common thread among the articles in this edition of *Global Education Review* seems to be the problems that have plagued the field of gifted education from the start, how to identify and serve students who are gifted in ways that are not only equitable but also provide added benefit to children and youth. These issues are compounded in schools with tight budgets and/or geographic distance from resources where resource pooling is difficult. Innovative ways of pooling resources with technology as described by Manuel and Freiman and building the capacity of teachers as described by Anzano and Callahan help address the issue of providing value added programs.

Perhaps the more challenging predicament is one of equity and access. As we see from the papers in this issue, equity and access are double sided. On one side, we must consider how students are identified in order to be inclusive of children and youth with gifts and talents from underrepresented groups as Wright, Ford and Young argue. On the other side is the perception amongst some that providing resources for children and youth who are gifted creates elitism and inequity as three papers in this issue suggest (Heuser, Wang & Shahid; Brown & Wishney; and Fu). These problems

present a call to action for the field of gifted education to not only increase awareness and address underrepresentation head on but to address inaccurate perceptions of what providing gifted education programs means for children and youth who might otherwise succumb to underachievement and the problems associated with lack of challenge.

About the author(s)

Sharon Dole, PhD, is Professor and Gifted Education Program Coordinator in the School of Teaching and Learning at Western Carolina University. She completed her PhD at the University of Georgia in special education with concentrations in gifted education and learning disabilities. Her research interests include twice exceptional students, social/emotional problems of adolescents, creativity, problem-based and project-based learning, teaching civility and compassion, and online teaching and learning.

Lisa Bloom, EdD, is the Jay M. Robinson Professor of Instructional Technology at Western Carolina University. She completed her Ed. D. in Education at West Virginia University.   Her research interests include gifted education, problem based learning, creativity, promoting social and emotional well-being of children and youth and instructional technology.