## DON AMBROSE AND ROBERT J. STERNBERG

# 1. PREVIEWING A COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION OF GIFTED EDUCATION AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Are gifted and talented young people ready to handle complex 21st-century socioeconomic, political, cultural, and technological conditions when they move into adulthood? Will complex 21st-century societies benefit sufficiently from the actions of the gifted and talented to survive and thrive in the rapidly evolving context of 21st-century globalization? While most of the research, practice, and theory development in gifted education focuses on the effectiveness of current practices and pays little attention to large-scale global issues there are some exceptions. For example, Joe Renzulli (2012) analyzed the goals of gifted education and talent development in today's world, highlighting the need for more insightful theory development in the field so we can more effectively enable bright young people to discover worthy aspirations while preparing for leadership roles in the complex 21st-century. He magnified the importance of helping the gifted and talented develop and employ executive functions that will enable them to become effective planners, decision makers, and ethical leaders in novel, complex situations. This advice is on the mark considering the growing complexity of 21st-century globalization.<sup>1</sup>

Another panoramic thinker in our field, Roland Persson (2012), showed us some ways in which gifted education is at least somewhat confined by dogmatic cultural insularity and excessive influence from the globalized socioeconomic system. The result is some insensitivity to cultural variation in conceptions of giftedness and talent development just when stronger awareness of diversity would help educators of the gifted prepare their high-potential students for interactions with diverse peers in an increasingly integrated international environment. Sternberg's (2005, 2009, 2013) conceptions of leadership also broaden our vision by emphasizing the need for a synthesis of wisdom, intelligence, and creativity so gifted leaders can promote ethical outcomes in complex conditions. One more promising sign that our field is capable of elevating its collective gaze out toward the global socioeconomic and cultural contexts that so strongly influence our work is the activity within the global awareness network of the National Association for Gifted Children as well as occasional publications aligned with that awareness (e.g., Gibson, Rimmington, & Landwehr-Brown, 2008; Roeper, 2008; Sisk, 2013; von Károlyi, 2008).

Based on interdisciplinary explorations and collaborations that kept turning up huge socioeconomic and cultural problems and opportunities and their connections

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with creativity, giftedness, and talent development (see Ambrose, 2009; Ambrose & Cross, 2009; Ambrose & Sternberg, 2012; Ambrose, Sternberg, & Sriraman, 2012; K. Sternberg & R. Sternberg, 2012; Sternberg, 2014; Sternberg & Jordan, 2005; R. Sternberg & K. Sternberg, 2008), we decided it would be wise to explore the ways in which giftedness, talent development, and creativity might be interacting with 21st-century globalization, which is the biggest contextual influence of our time. Consequently, we designed this project involving far-reaching, interdisciplinary analyses of globalization and the high-impact trends and issues it is generating. We invited leading thinkers from the fields of creative studies, gifted education, and general education to respond to an interdisciplinary focus chapter on globalization (the next chapter in this volume) from their areas of expertise. Those analyzing globalization through the lenses of gifted education and talent development joined us in the formation of this book. Those doing a similar analysis through the lenses of creativity research and theory clustered together as contributing authors for a sister book on creativity (Ambrose & Sternberg, 2016). Taken together, these two projects align with recommendations from leading scholars of creativity and giftedness who envision the need for the development of stronger creative capacities, wisdom, and ethics so bright young people will be better able to grapple with the complex challenges of the 21st century (see Gardner, 2012; Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001; Reis & Renzulli, 2010; Renzulli, 2012; Sternberg, 2013, 2014).

The following questions preview more in-depth analyses that you will find in the chapters to come. If a question piques your interest, we recommend that you go directly to the relevant chapter for more in-depth exploration.

## Questions Based on Interdisciplinary Analyses of 21st-Century Globalization

These questions emerge from the next chapter in this volume, which is the interdisciplinary focus chapter contributing authors used as a basis for their analyses from their areas of expertise:

- Are gifted education programs designed to enable bright young people to grasp the complexities of 21st-century problems that transcend international borders as well as the borders between academic disciplines?
- Can gifted education programs help bright young people think long term so they can appreciate the nature of problems that emerge and evolve over decades or even centuries?
- To what extent are gifted young people ready to understand and capitalize on unprecedented opportunities emerging from rapidly evolving developments in technology and scientific innovation?
- Can the gifted and talented develop the ethical awareness they will need to grapple with the severe socioeconomic inequality that 21st-century globalization is generating?

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- How many of today's economic and political leaders went through gifted programs when they were children? How many of these gifted individuals grew up to become clever innovators with stunted ethics?
- If a large "creative intelligence gap" separates our current level of cognitive ability from the much higher level we will need for solving today's huge problems, can gifted education programs enable us to close that gap?
- Will gifted young people be able to navigate through the exponential knowledge growth produced by 21st-century information technology and scientific networking?
- Are the gifted and talented more or less likely to be immune to the dogmatism that makes ethnic, religious, and national groups engage in conflict with one another?
- Does gifted education make it more likely that bright young people will be able to work together in the diverse teams that tend to outperform homogenous teams when it comes to grappling with highly complex problems?
- If gifted education emphasizes the development of the gifted *individual*, does that emphasis work against the future emergence of the teamwork necessary for the scientific networking that promises to help us solve some of the biggest problems of the 21st century?
- Can gifted education help the leaders and entrepreneurs of tomorrow escape their own selfish inclinations so they won't aggravate the growing problem of severe inequality in an increasingly deregulated, globalized socioeconomic system?
- If democracies in the 21st century are fragile and prone to degeneration into plutocracies (rule by and for the extremely rich), do gifted education programs provide sufficient sociopolitical awareness to serve as an antidote to the erosion and collapse of democracy?
- Are gifted adults aware of environmental and socioeconomic trends that are strengthening the possibility that we will suffer from a major collapse of civilization some time in the 21st century? If they are aware of the possibility of such a collapse, to what extent do they care about it?<sup>2</sup>
- Are some gifted, powerful adults initiating and promoting narrowly conceived, dogmatic school reform initiatives that are driving American education back to the 19th century while some other nations are striving to move their education systems from 20th century models into the 21st century?
- Are today's citizens, policymakers, and academic researchers aware that some powerful school reform initiatives are pressuring American education to evolve into a system of educational apartheid that provides privileged young people with outstanding learning and networking opportunities while pushing the vast majority of those less fortunate into intellectually barren, quasi-militaristic, under-resourced schools?
- How many of us are aware that China and the USA are involved in an ironic circular chase because they are trying to copy and catch up with each other in the design of their 21st century educational systems?

- Do gifted programs provide sufficient opportunity for the development of the interdisciplinary thinking necessary for understanding the important 21st-century issues that extend beyond the borders of single academic disciplines and professional fields?
- Will graduates of our gifted programs have the wisdom to support, oppose, or shape the development of new technologies in the 21st century based on critical thinking about the likely implications of those technological advances?
- Do our gifted programs help students develop the entrepreneurial savvy and resilience necessary for adaptation in conditions of growing insecurity and unpredictability?
- How can gifted young people discover and develop strong aspirations and talents in turbulent, unpredictable 21st-century work environments?
- How can the gifted and talented discover and develop leadership potential in an integrated, globalized world that brings together very diverse individuals and groups?

# Questions Derived from the Work of Our Contributing Authors

These questions arise from the remaining chapters in the volume. The names of the authors whose work is relevant to each question are written in parentheses.

- How clear and useful is the distinction between the "gifted" and the "non-gifted" in view of the talents needed for success in the 21st century? Does the talentdevelopment paradigm provide useful guidance for educators of the gifted in today's world? (David Yun Dai, Chapter 3)
- How much control do gifted individuals actually have in their navigation through the turbulence and complexity of 21st-century events and circumstances? (Roland Persson, Chapter 4)
- What dispositions and psychosocial skills can help the gifted young person become eminent in a specific domain in today's conditions? (Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, Rena Subotnik and Frank Worrell, Chapter 5)
- Can we extend beyond the cognitive domain to develop the whole person, which includes the social, affective, emotional, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of experience? How will this holistic emphasis on child and adolescent development align with the demands of the 21st century? (Kirsi Tirri, Chapter 6)
- Can gifted education recognize and address the huge problem of conflicting core values in 21st-century societies? (Jennifer Cross and Tracy Cross, Chapter 7)
- Can comparing and contrasting the differing constraints confronted by education in very different nations with differing ideologies help us gain insights about the optimal education of the gifted and talented in the 21st century? (Bharath Sriraman and Kyeonghwa Lee, Chapter 8)
- Is it possible for severely deprived, culturally diverse, gifted young people in Latin America to benefit from the same opportunities enjoyed by the gifted

and talented in Europe and North America when it comes to the discovery and development of aspirations and talents? (Sheyla Blumen, Chapter 9)

- Can the organizations of the 21st century dismantle stereotypes that suppress the development of creative intelligence and undermine efforts to engage in productive innovation? (Mary Jacobsen, Chapter 10)
- Can we help gifted young people discover stronger senses of empowerment, ethics, and connection with others that will help them overcome the excessive materialism and individualism of today's Western culture? (Dorothy Sisk, Chapter 11)
- Will gifted education be able to developed autonomous learners, complex thinkers, and problem solvers who can integrate their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical capacities in complex 21st century conditions? (George Betts, Blanche Kapushion, and Robin Carey, Chapter 12)
- To what extent can gifted learners develop higher-level thinking skills and inclinations for integrating learning from differing subject areas in order to address today's real-world problems? (Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Chapter 13)
- Are educators of the gifted able to identify the different types of learners and adjust their talent development to minimize the gap between their potential and actual performance so they have the best opportunities for success in the complexity of the 21st century? (Seon-Young Lee, Chapter 14)
- Are we able to help twice-exceptional individuals address their weaknesses while recognizing and emphasizing their strengths so they can meet the demands of 21st-century globalization? (Rick Olenchak, Laura Jacobs, Maryam Hussain, Kelly Lee, and John Gaa, Chapter 15)

Only a few of many possible questions are listed here, just enough to give you a sense of the intellectual terrain our contributors chose to explore in efforts to integrate giftedness and talent development with 21st-century globalization. We leave it to you to raise more questions as you make your way through the pages to come. Our hope is that this book will prompt readers to pay more attention to the effects of large-scale contextual influences on their own work.

# AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS OF THE VOLUME

This book includes four sections that connect much of what we know about giftedness and talent development with the challenges of 21st-century globalization. The first section introduces the project and provides an interdisciplinary framework for analyses of globalization. The second section addresses conceptions of giftedness and talent development within the context of globalization. Authors in the third section come up with ways to make gifted education align better with 21st-century contextual influences. Finally, section four represents the synthesis of the contributions in the volume.

Our introductory section titled Recognizing Powerful Contextual Influences on Giftedness and Talent Development, is comprised of this introductory chapter

and a focus chapter titled, Twenty-First Century Contextual Influences on the Life Trajectories of the Gifted and Talented. In the focus chapter, Don Ambrose provides a conceptual model based on the integration of perspectives from multiple disciplines. The model illustrates the threat of enormous macroproblems and the potential benefits of unprecedented macro-opportunities that arise from socioeconomic, technological, cultural, and political-ideological conditions in the 21st century. The macroproblems threaten to crush individuals and societies that find themselves mired in a miserable trap underneath an enormous wave of globalization. Fortunately, the macro-opportunities promise to lift individuals and societies toward unprecedented success, if the education system can enable today's young people to leap to the crest of the globalization wave. After the analysis of 21st-century demands, suggestions are made about the blend of knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for dealing with the macroproblems and capitalizing on the macro-opportunities. This focus chapter serves as a launching pad for the other contributing authors' analyses. They use it to examine ways in which their expertise fits together with trends and issues in the 21st century.

David Yun Dai initiates section two with his chapter titled, *Envisioning a New Century of Gifted Education: The Case for a Paradigm Shift.* In his analysis, David continues his ongoing scrutiny of the gifted-child paradigm, this time in the context of 21st-century conditions. He considers the nature and shortcomings of current conceptions of giftedness as well as some other challenges to the effectiveness of work in the field. He sets the stage by taking an excursion through the research on creativity and giftedness, paying special attention to the work of pioneers such as Paul Torrance and Joseph Renzulli. He also analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of competing paradigms in gifted education, emphasizing the limitations of the essentialist conception<sup>3</sup> and the possible fit of the talent development framework with the 21st-century socioeconomic and cultural context.

Roland Persson exercises his penchant for big-picture thinking in his chapter, *Human Nature: The Unpredictable Variable in Engineering the Future.* He temporarily backs away from the specifics of giftedness, talent development, and creativity to explore the bigger issue of human nature itself. Part of the analysis brings forth the somewhat troubling possibility that not even the gifted and talented have as much control over life's events as they think they do, and that they might have even more difficulty than most because they are often marginalized due to their differences from the mainstream. He suggests that we must come to terms with these limitations in order to be more effective in exerting our shaping influences over the powerful trends and issues of the 21st century. Social cohesion and ethical awareness must come into play if we are to nudge globalization in positive directions.

Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, Rena Subotnik, and Frank Worrell draw some intriguing connections between their influential mega-model for talent development and 21st-century conditions in their chapter titled, *The Role of Domains in the Conceptualization of Talent*. The complexity of 21st-century globalization exerts strong influences on talent development, which was complex enough even in far

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less turbulent 20th-century socio-contextual environments. The talent development mega-model portrays optimal growth of high ability as a sequence of successful transitions from strong potential to competency within a domain to expertise within that domain and finally to eminence for those most able to blend their outstanding capacities with educational and career opportunities. While revealing the dynamics of these successful developmental transitions, the authors discuss some ways in which existing domains are changing and new domains might be emerging through the influence of globalization. The take-home message is that support for the development of knowledge, interests, and especially psychosocial strengths must be informed by knowledge of the talent development demands embedded in the various domains.

Kirsi Tirri provides an international, multidimensional analysis in her chapter titled, *Holistic Perspectives on Gifted Education for the 21st Century*. She shows how many European nations interpret the purpose of education as encompassing much more than the cognitive domain, which dominates American education. This broader view of education includes the development of the whole person, which in turn embraces the social and affective aspects of experience as well as emotional and spiritual concerns. While there is much less emphasis on identification and programming for the gifted there is room for their appropriate development due to the more expansive vision of education in Finland. Some particular aspects of this expansive vision include attention to distinct, multiple intelligences, ethical sensitivity, moral judgment, values and worldviews, altruism, respect for diversity, and discovery of a sense of purpose. The end result is a more global vision of gifted and general education for a globalized world.

Jennifer Cross and Tracy Cross situate gifted education within one of the most pressing problems in today's world. In their chapter titled, *The Macroproblem of Conflicting Values in 21st-Century Education*, they show how an important characteristic of 21st-century globalization is the way in which it ties together diverse populations through intricate socioeconomic networks. This networking has significant advantages but it also brings forth some enormous problems. When populations have differing, conflicting values they are likely to have great difficulty when it comes to finding common ground. Misunderstandings and conflicts will ensue. Fortunately, Jennifer and Tracy tackle this issue head on. After providing an in-depth overview of the scholarship on values, they identify the ways in which divergent values can subvert attempts to generate an educational system that can address the challenges of the 21st century. Their ambitious attempt to analyze the barriers imposed by values conflicts shows up in a framework connecting various value systems to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are required for success in the context of 21st-century globalization.

Bharath Sriraman and Kyeonghwa Lee consider the effects of globalization on two Asian nations in their chapter titled, *The Hobbesian Trap in Contemporary India and South Korea: Implications for Education in the 21st Century*. Their analysis portrays some ways in which globalization exerts differing impacts on

these nations, which represent very different settings for the nurturance of gifts and talents. While the economies of both nations have grown considerably, young people still face some unusual constraints when it comes to the discovery of aspirations and the development of their talents. The authors invoke constructs such as ideological frameworks and social Darwinian processes to clarify the nature of these contextual influences. They conclude with some comments about what each nation must do to strengthen the chances for the success of their next generations as they confront the turbulence of 21st-century globalization.

Sheyla Blumen takes us into Latin American contexts in her chapter titled, *High* Achieving Deprived Young People Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century. She describes some daunting challenges faced by gifted education in Latin America and the Caribbean region while emphasizing some advocacy efforts on behalf of indigenous populations suffering from socioeconomic deprivation. She zeroes in on Peru, which provides examples of some promising attempts at providing impoverished, culturally diverse young people with opportunities to discover and develop their potential in spite of the odds against them. Her analysis includes interpretations of ways in which 21st-century conditions are influencing the life chances of bright young people in this part of the world.

Mary Jacobsen gives us a look at organizational development, leadership, and innovative processes in her chapter titled, Clearing the Way for Pivotal 21st-Century Innovation: More Talent Literacy, Less Talent Management. She turns our attention toward the need for innovation in our organizations in view of the complex, new demands on organizational systems posed by developments in the 21st century. Mary argues that those who work in organizations, especially those who take on leadership roles, must break themselves free from counterproductive stereotypes that suppress the work of talented innovators. These stereotypes often involve colleagues' negative perceptions of talented employees. She uses the term "talent literacy" to help us understand the need for clarifying the nature of our misconceptions and dogmatism when it comes to appreciating and facilitating the work of those most capable of lifting organizations out of various forms of entrenchment and moving those organizations toward the acquisition of innovative new capacities that will enable them to succeed in complex, 21st-century conditions. While emphasizing the importance of innovators, she frequently returns to discussions of changing societal conditions and the ways in which these conditions are making the work of talented innovators more important than ever before. Particularly useful is an ICD (intensity, complexity, drive) model she develops to enable better understanding of the productive attributes and contributions highly talented individuals can bring to organizations, and to the world.

Dorothy Sisk closes this section by investigating some problems faced by many in today's globalized world. In her chapter, *Filling that Empty Space in the Lives of People in a Globalized World Beset with Turbulence and Crises,* she discusses the sense of angst that can arise when our values are driven by excessive individualism and materialism, as they are in much of the world today. Arguing that the gifted and talented suffer more than most from these problems she advocates for the development of spiritual intelligence that brings into play intuitive processes, visualization, and other practices that typically aren't addressed by formal education. She illustrates her arguments with discussions of exemplars of spiritual intelligence and recommends some ways to turn education in a direction favorable to the advancement of these broader capacities.

The third section of the book is titled *New Practicalities of Gifted Education in the 21st Century*. Here the authors explore a variety of practical modifications of gifted education that can better align programs, curriculum, and instruction with the demands of globalization.

George Betts, Blanche Karpushian, and Robin Carey recognized the topic of 21st-century globalization as a good fit with an influential conceptual framework in the field. They articulate and employ this framework in their chapter titled, *The Autonomous Learner Model: Supporting the Development of Problem Finders, Creative Problem Solvers, and Producers of Knowledge to Successfully Navigate the 21st Century.* The well-known autonomous learner model integrates a wide array of abilities and processes that, taken together, can strengthen the aspirations, talents, and life prospects of young people. The unprecedented nature of today's large-scale problems and opportunities require considerable amounts of higher-order thinking as well as visionary aspiration development and the nurturing of initiative over the long term. Fortunately, the autonomous learner model, which has been undergoing revisions throughout the years, is designed to develop these capacities.

Joyce VanTassel-Baska contemplates some modifications to gifted education in her chapter *Creativity and Innovation: The Twin Pillars of Accomplishment in the 21st Century.* While outlining some big-picture patterns in the structure and dynamics of gifted education over the years, Joyce argues that current emphases on the development of creativity should be augmented with more attention to the development of propensities for innovative work. Through detailed analyses she distinguishes between these emphases and then shows how strengthening the innovative inclinations and abilities of gifted young people will align them and society more accurately with the demands of the 21st century. In essence, she recommends an injection of pragmatism into gifted education and into the subsequent adult lives of the gifted. The development of STEM innovative ability receives particular attention.

In her chapter titled, *Navigating Talent Development by Fulfilling Gaps between Gifted Potential and Performance*, Seon-Young Lee analyzes some important aspects of gifted underachievement while thinking about ways in which the problem of underachievement is magnified in 21st-century conditions. While underachievement always has been a problem it is even more pernicious for individuals and societies that must navigate through the big problems and opportunities presented by 21st-century globalization. While investigating underachievement, Seon-Young analyzes an array of categories into which gifted underachievers can fit. These categories have to do with cognitive style, academic motivation, sensitivity,

behavioral issues, and interpersonal relationships. She identifies 13 different types of gifted underachievers and recommends strategies that can address the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Richard Olenchak, Laura Jacobs, Maryam Hussain, Kelly Lee, and John Gaa take us beyond the cognitive realm to focus on affective development in today's turbulent, socioeconomic context. In their chapter, *Giftedness Plus Talent Plus Disabilities: Twice-Exceptional Persons, the 21st Century, and Lifespan Development as Viewed through an Affective Lens,* the authors also consider the increasingly prominent phenomenon of dual exceptionality, which has some interesting potential connections with 21st-century conditions. This is especially the case when the authors look at the lifespan development of twice-exceptional individuals and their life prospects as adults. They set up their analysis by providing an overview of the intricate interplay between nature and nurture in the development of affect. They cover a considerable amount of intellectual territory in the analysis, including neuroscientific findings about affective and cognitive development.

Finally in section 5 Robert Sternberg integrates the complex, diverse elements of giftedness, talent development, and globalization in his chapter titled Has the Term "Gifted" Become Giftig (Poisonous) to the Nurturance of Gifted Potential? "Giftig" is the German word for "toxic." And the use of the term has become, in some instances, toxic. As used, it can hold back education. At one time, educators thought they had a clear sense of what "giftedness" is: It was high IO. That's how Lewis Terman and his colleagues operationalized the term back in the early part of the 20th century. Now, a century later, many educators are still using the term in more or less the same way. But does high IQ, or even high school grades, represent the future of what we need to nurture gifted potential in the 21st century? By using this term, are we dogmatically locking ourselves into the distant past rather than opening up a new future? Sternberg argues in his final chapter that the term in its traditional usage so longer fits the needs of our world. In more modern senses, the term has come to mean so many things to so many different people that it no longer is serving the constructive function it once may have served. It may even be encouraging the identification of children other than those best equipped to deal with the problems of the future. It is time at least to reexamine the term, and if we continue to use it, think about what it should mean for the challenges of the 21st century, not for those of the 20th.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The world is facing challenges in the 21st century that are very different from those in the 20th. Income inequality is increasing and shows no sign of abating. The enemies of civilization are no longer clearly defined hostile national entities, but rather rapidly shifting terrorist groups. Technology is providing some jobs but also eliminating many others. Competition is global rather than local. And nations possess weapons of mass destruction that are under the control of present and perhaps future

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leaders whose trustworthiness with the destructive power they hold is, at the very least, questionable. This volume is unlike others in the field of giftedness: It seeks to understand the term "giftedness" in the context not just of past and contemporary challenges, but also of future challenges, some of which hold the power to destroy civilization as we know it. The volume represents the kind of thinking for where the field of giftedness needs to go, not just where it has been.

#### NOTES

- The term globalization signifies the massive socioeconomic, technological, and cultural integration of populations around the world (see Beneria, 2003; Goldin & Mariathasan, 2014; Rodrik, 2007; Sen, 2010; Stiglitz, 2003; Tsing, 2004). More details about the nature of globalization and the problems and opportunities it creates appear in the next chapter of this book.
- <sup>2</sup> Prominent scholars from various disciplines argue that we have reached a point where our influences on the biosphere can spin out of control and precipitate the implosion and disintegration of lifesustaining systems some time in the 21st century. The next chapter in this book provides more detail.
- <sup>3</sup> The essentialist conception of giftedness revolves around gifted-nongifted distinctions based on the permanence of general intelligence. See David's chapter for details.

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