

Preface



Photographer Fran Hines

Over the past two decades, economic crises have impacted the field of education in countries such as the United States and Great Britain, which resulted in district-wide budget cuts, a lack of federal funding and/or a lack of legislative support. Consequently, there has been a loss of specialized teachers and programs for ‘gifted,’ ‘highly able’ or ‘high potential’ children. In 1994, a worldwide conference in Salamanca, Spain favored a policy shift for inclusive education to develop special needs education as an integral part of all educational programs in Europe. The UNESCO *Salamanca Agreement*, representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations, committed to following the global movement of *Education for All* by meeting the learning needs of all children. In 2001, the United States followed suit with its *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* and focused on students who did not meet proficiency in national testing. In 2003, *Education for All* revised its vision and policy and replaced the language and provisions of the *Salamanca Agreement* to require an appropriate education for all children, including the gifted. It was not until twelve years later in December 2015 that the

United States also called for change in state advocacy and resource allocation that included gifted children with an updated passage of NCLB known as the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA).

In 2002, after 25 years of teaching a program for gifted and talented children in the United States, I became one of the unfortunate teachers whose job was cut, leaving gifted children in my school district without an appropriate education to address their exceptional learning needs. Therefore, as a gifted education specialist, I refocused my career to become a consultant in the field. I worked both nationally and internationally with universities, school systems and associations for the gifted to bring special attention to the important role of teachers. I believed that teachers, as facilitators of differentiation and higher-order thinking skills, could create and provide an appropriate learning environment for all students in the classroom, including a challenging education for gifted children.

Today, as states and countries continue to undergo educational reform, we recognize the importance of providing opportunities that motivate and engage all learners in the classroom, especially those individuals who were left aside as to make it on their own—the gifted. Many states and countries differ in the pace of educational development and, also, in the policies and actual practices of identification and provision for gifted children. However, because hundreds of definitions exist for the term ‘gifted,’ and there are many different characteristics in scholarship and leadership that are valued by various cultures, the concept of giftedness must be defined within the context of a particular culture.

Despite any differences in cultures, while networking around the world with adults who work with gifted children, I realize we all face similar challenges. Ironically, because new teachers continue to enter the educational profession, the same questions still arise for how to best identify a child as ‘gifted,’ and, once identified, what to do next to encourage a gifted child to reach their full potential.

Arguably, labeling a child as ‘gifted,’ or a synonym thereof, is not enough. Teachers need to assess and address the individual needs of a child to help them on their journey of lifelong learning. Unfortunately, teachers face an even greater challenge in understanding the nature of giftedness because ‘gifted’ is not only an ambiguous term, but the identification of a gifted child is now complicated due to the integration of immigrants in classrooms throughout the world. Therefore, you may need to ‘look through a different lens’ and gain a new perspective to effectively intervene with quality educational practices for high ability children.

I wrote Your Passport to Gifted Education as a textbook intended primarily for an audience of North American teachers who are new to the profession and have little, if any, knowledge about gifted children. However, by understanding the dynamics of giftedness and providing a variety of strategies needed for intervention, I believe my book can serve an even greater audience to include teachers in other countries. My book is written within an international context to underline the importance of preparing gifted children as resilient individuals who will not only survive, but, will also thrive to successfully compete in the workforce of a global economy.

According to the past several years of the international *Pisa Educational Rankings* and the *Worldwide Provision to Develop Gifts and Talents* survey (2010), you may be surprised to learn students from Asian countries as well as from Finland outperform the United States and many European countries. Because of a decline in brain power, it is critical to examine the impact of your own teaching practices and become informed of strategies to engage and motivate students to develop a ‘growth mindset,’ i.e., ‘can do attitude,’ to value effort in their work, and, thus, to take academic risks that can extend their learning.

Your Passport to Gifted Education reveals both theoretical and practical knowledge gained from three decades of my experience as an educator to provide knowledge in the field of gifted education for pre-service and classroom teachers that can be shared with parents, colleagues, administrators and policy-makers. In addition to facilitating a program for gifted children, I have had experience as a former special education, elementary and middle school classroom teacher. Based upon my teaching experience, I agree with Del Siegle that every child has the right to learn something new every day. Thus, I wrote this book to provide knowledge and build awareness that informs and empowers teachers to become advocates by intervening for a population of exceptional learners. By equipping yourself with timely international research and ‘tried and true’ intervention strategies for both teaching and parenting, your appreciation for the uniqueness of every gifted child will develop. Although the core of my book centers on teacher intervention for gifted children, these teaching practices can be used with all students. Gifted children aren’t better than their peers. They are simply different, and, therefore, experience different needs and require different approaches to learning. As teachers, you need to intervene by asking, ‘Who is this individual? What do they need to be successful? How can I help?’

Your Passport to Gifted Education is written as a three part analogy of taking a flight to the world of gifted education: (1) Embarking on a Journey; (2) Preparing for Departure and (3) Planning for Arrival. Chapter 1 begins with an international historical overview of what is meant by the term ‘gifted.’ A brief description of the law and legislation in Europe and the United States are reviewed to evidence the myth that gifted children can make it on their own. For this book, I have accepted the definition of ‘gifted’ that is based upon the 1971 *Marland Report*, a springboard used for not only the 50 states, but for various countries as well. Chapter 1 will also familiarize you with the history of gifted education in the United States.

Just as ‘One size does not fit all,’ there is not one route for teachers to navigate in the field of gifted education. Chapter 2 presents a choice of four widely-acclaimed international identification models or frameworks for school districts to consider in the selection process of identifying their high performance learners. Each model offers a different approach, which will impact how to provide for the targeted talent pool. Two of the identification models originated in the United States. The first model offers a triangulated enrichment approach that is markedly different from comparative models of its time because it did not base giftedness solely on IQ scores. The second model provides a psycho-social approach reflecting an individual’s current and future potential. The third model, emanating from Canada,

proposes a natural relationship for ‘giftedness’ that evolves to ‘talent’ through a variety of catalysts, i.e., interpersonal and environmental factors. The fourth and final model presents a framework from Great Britain that offers a systematic inclusive approach for identifying and nurturing high performance learning at schools to provide outstanding educational experiences for highly able and all children.

Chapters 3–10 follow a particular structure. Each chapter is introduced with a quote. A metaphor is then used to connect your journey with the world of gifted education. Next, background information is presented to support the content with international research. A case study, written in the first person, reveals a gifted child’s perception of a classroom experience relating to the main idea of the chapter. The gifted children and situations in the case studies were inspired by real life children I have known. Last of all, strategies are provided for both teachers and parents that offer insight and provide help for intervention.

Your Passport to Gifted Education concludes by awarding you with a ‘Landing Card’ for journeying to the world of gifted education. The Landing Card serves as a bookmark depicting the key concepts gleaned from your journey to assist with writing lesson plans and curriculum, conferencing with parents and/or working with gifted children. It is followed by a ‘Resource Directory’ that lists international organizations as well as an Appendix called ‘Index of Intervention Strategies’ to support and extend your lifelong journey.

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work with gifted children, we do not stand alone. We share similar aspirations, challenges and concerns for our children. By appreciating the uniqueness of each child, including those who are gifted, we can use our knowledge to intervene and advocate to make a difference in their lives, both now and in the future.

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