

Creative Pathways:

# Catalysts in Gifted Education, Talent Development and Creativity: An Interview with Dr. Dorothy A. Sisk, Lamar, Texas

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Taisir Subhi Yamin (TSY), Fred A. Bonner II (FB) and Stella L. Smith (SS) interviewed internationally renowned theorist Dorothy A. Sisk (DS). The interview took place at the ICIE 2019 conference held at Prairie View A&M University in Houston, Texas.

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**TSY:** Thank you so much. Dorothy, can you explain what motivated you to enter this field of knowledge?

**DS:** I happened to be at the right place at the right time! When I first started teaching in Garden Grove, California, the state of California was beginning to move forward to serve gifted and talented students. And in my graduate work, my classroom professors were Ruth Martinson, the editor of the Marland Report and Juliana Gensley an original Terman student. They were very close with Jeanne Delp who was our district gifted supervisor. I would be teaching and look up and there would be Ruth and Juliana observing my gifted students working on their projects. The affirmation and motivation I received from these three women propelled me toward seeking a Master's degree and culminating with a doctorate in gifted education.

**TSY:** *When did you start working in this field? 10 years ago?*

**DS:** Now I know why you called me a legend! I started teaching in 1958, and there are probably people in the audience thinking, ‘I wasn’t even born yet’ and I earned a MA in 1960 and my doctorate in 1966. I have been working in this field over 60 years!



**FB:** **That is wonderful. So, what kind of major challenges have you faced in the field?**

**DS:** I think the major challenge that the field faces and that I faced is the achievement gap between low income and minority students and other students. Many schools still use achievement tests as part of the identification process, and these students are behind before they enter school. In addition, we have an attitudinal problem in that teachers don't see that highly active male, an African American student who asks a lot of questions and gets up and moves around, as gifted. They tend to see that student as having ADHD or another type of learning disability.

When I taught at the University of South Florida, as an assistant professor, I worked closely with the learning disability supervisor in Tampa. She called me and said, “Can you come down to my office, I have something I need to show you.” She had a stack of Weschler Intelligence Scale tests and she said, “All of these students were nominated for the learning disability program, and when they were evaluated, they are testing gifted.” We have a major problem with teachers’ perception of gifted students. Changing that perception is a major challenge. Another challenge is helping teachers realize that if children are in your classroom, you don’t require them to do everything that everybody else does and then additional work. Teachers need to differentiate the curriculum for gifted students so that they will be engaged in work matching their interests and abilities. We have a big challenge with this.



**FB:** *How did you become involved internationally?*

**DS:** Internationally? It began with a wonderful invitation from Joe Renzulli. He called and said, “I have been invited to Henry Collis’ international conference in London and I can’t go. As a delegate, would you like to go?” and I said, ‘Sure.’ I attended the conference and while we were there, Harold Lyon (then the director of the U.S. Office of Gifted and Talented), said: “why don’t we start an international conference.” He grabbed a small plastic globe and started walking around asking people to place money in the globe. They became instant members of an organization that was going to be founded. When I returned to the United States, I was asked to take over the position directing the U. S. Office of Gifted and Talented. Seven individuals (Dan Bitan from Israel, Levcho Zdravchev from Bulgaria, Bob Sawyer from California, Elizabeth Neuman from Columbia University, Alex Dupont De Bie from Delaware, Henry Collis from the U.K. and me) met in San Francisco, sat down and crafted a constitution, and secured 501 C designation. We were off and running.



**SS:** *Can you describe your most significant accomplishments and contributions?*

**DS:** I think my most significant contributions were made when I was directing the Office of Gifted and Talented. I had a small budget of 2.5 million, which really, at that point with the estimate of 2.5 million gifted students in the United States, I had a dollar per student. I didn't do things like most directors; for example, if I had a report to deliver to Congress, I didn't ask an aide take it over. I would walk over and introduce myself to the legislative assistant, who usually was the individual who made sure whatever you brought over got a “hearing.” They would take the time to talk to me about the issue or the report, then they could share that with their legislator.

Also, at that time, we were very fortunate to have an advocate in George Bush who was vice president during my stint in D.C., and he suggested having a cookout at his home, and he said. “I will invite every senator and every member of the House of Representatives, and we will have a cookout about the gifted”. I replied, ‘Wonderful, and I will go to Philadelphia and locate one gifted child to interact with each of the senators and house members. The Supervisor of the Gifted in Philadelphia brought 90 of her gifted students in grades 2-8 to D.C. for our cookout. I told the students, ‘When you get to the Vice President’s house go over and introduce yourself to one of the legislators and tell them about your program.’ One 2<sup>nd</sup> grade girl walked over very quickly to one of the legislators (Rep. Shirley Chisholm) who placed her on her lap and started talking to her. It was a phenomenal experience as the gifted students eagerly interacted with the legislators. Vice President George Bush jumped up on a picnic table and started talking about the need for gifted education. Of course, I am listening very carefully to see, if his facts are accurate

and they were! This was an amazing advocacy event, and when the legislators went back to their offices, they helped us get the funding for gifted education.

Interestingly, later on when the son George W. Bush became the Texas Governor, I had a project with his wife, Laura called *One Hundred Mothers Read*. I gave one hundred mothers little tape recorders, and they were to read to their child each night. I taught them a thinking model that involved asking five questions to their child (after reading a story). The questions were based on Calvin Taylor's model. Laura invited us once a month to the Governor's home to have lunch and talk about our projects. I remember telling the Governor how his father jumped up on the picnic table and started talking about gifted education, and how he was factual and enthusiastic! Governor Bush said, "My father is a quick study." So, I guess when you asked, "What did you accomplish?" I think making sure that we had funding to provide projects for local schools and states was an important accomplishment I like the notion of changing one person and the domino effect, as they in turn change others. Over the years, I had many teachers in my classes who became "student talent scouts". Those teachers are my finest accomplishment.

**TSY:** *Can you tell us more about your involvement at the international level because you have been in several countries and you were doing a lot of capacity building, inspiring teachers in different cultures and different countries?*

**DS:** When we first started the World Council, we had a vision of four divisions in the different parts of the world (North America, South America, Europe and Asia). The only one that really evolved was the Asia Federation. That group has provided conferences and substantial training in gifted education for over 40 years. The one that was supposed to be in Canada and the United States never was developed, nor was the one in South America. However



With the First Lady Laura Bush

the World Council of Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC) has remained strong and every two years, there is an international conference. These are well attended because many countries need training for teachers and the information provided by WCGT is greatly appreciated. The 2020 conference is in the United States in Tennessee.

Becoming involved with the International Centre for Innovation in Education (ICIE) also has made a phenomenal difference in my scholarly work. Traveling to several international conferences as a speaker and submitting articles to the ICIE journal helped ensure that I kept abreast of gifted education in other countries. I served as executive administrator of WCGTC for 10 years and edited their journal. At one interesting point, the journal was published by Bulgaria --at no cost to WCGTC! We were very fortunate to have people like Levcho Zdravchev who was one of the seven founders of WCGTC; he attended every WCGTC conference. The first president of the World Council was Iraj Bromand from Iran. The seven executive member met at his home in Teheran and discussed activities that we could sponsor. We decided to start a school for gifted students in Teheran. When the Shah was displaced in the revolution, Iraj was very fortunate to be able to leave Iran; he is now is living in California. Much of what we were

able to accomplish In Iran included breaking down some of the barriers that existed between teachers and students, and introducing Art and Music to the curriculum. Education in Iran was quite formal and the idea of working in small groups was brand new to them. They were used to lecturing and direct instruction, so we had some challenging and exciting times introducing problem based collaboration learning and differentiated instruction.

**SS:** *So, what do you wish that the researchers in this field would know? What knowledge would you wish for them to have?*

**DC:** I would like for researchers in the field to engage in more action research, such as the use of opportunity classes to help identify potential gifted students. In Puerto Rico, working with the Department of Defense, a Supervisor of Gifted said to me, "I would like you to go in each one of our classrooms and do a demonstration, so the teachers can see how these strategies can be applied in Kindergarten through 12." I'm thinking, 'you are lucky you're talking to me because I can do that', but nobody else that I know could or would or try that. I began with the kindergarten and gave them a little lesson with a lot of critical thinking in Reading as I posed questions. You could see the gifted ones raising their hands, leaning forward, and suggesting creative endings to the story. They asked me to do a parent presentation that evening. As I was talking to the parents, one mother walked up to me and said, "My daughter told me I had to come tonight, and she said you were so kind to the students." She shared that she was the Lieutenant Colonel's wife and said, "I will do everything I can to provide gifted education for our children."

As I was walking out, that precious little 2<sup>nd</sup> grade student, said "thank you for being kind to us." I wondered what she perceived as being kind! Talking with them? Giving them praise for their responses? That experience taught me a great deal about what can be done in terms of finding that little spark of giftedness by asking the right questions and providing open ended activities. When you do that, giftedness just pops right out and those children can then be provided more activities to demonstrate their giftedness. Eventually, they can be identified with formal testing procedures. I would like to see researchers do action research to find high potential students and work with them and watch them demonstrate their talents and abilities.

**TSY:** *Thank you so much. Can you please expand on the opportunities and specific strategies.. How can teachers stimulate the development of excellence in their schools?*

**DS:** I have two online classes that I am teaching with eighty eight teachers in each class. And you might think that in an online class you wouldn't have much interaction. I find I have more interaction online than I do in face-to-face classes! The teachers are not only telling me what they're doing in their classes,(An Exceptional Child Class), but they're telling me what they're learning about themselves. They describe what they are learning about their children. They highlight their commitment to stimulate excellence in their schools. These teachers have become advocates, sharing articles they have to read with their principals and other teachers. They have asked for public relations people to work with the parents to let them know what the law says about exceptional children, and that they have a right to see what is happening with their child in their individual educational plan.

Teachers are on the front lines and they can be role models of excellence. As teachers stand in front of their class, greet the students as they come into the room, and provide mindfulness activities to help them settled down and be calm, other teachers will be watching and saying 'wow she's at her door every morning' and her students are calm and ready to work, We had a program in Pensacola, Florida where the teachers actually went outside and waved to the students each day as they left on the bus. Brown Barge School had a warm atmosphere full of caring and compassion, and their students achieved! These are things we do not talk enough about a lot in education. The essential link between caring, empathy, compassion and excellence is amazing. As students feel they belong, their achievement escalates The belonging is essential.



**TSY:** *Yes, when children feel like they belong in a particular space, learning can be activated.*

**DS:** Exactly and when the children are not doing well in school, they sometimes say that they feel that they do not belong.



In Thailand

**TSY:** *Can you please explain some of the strengths and limits of “Gifted Education?”*

**DS:** I think one of the strengths of gifted education is we have educators who are on the firing lines working 150%. These individuals are putting themselves on the line to ensure that we are following the rules and the regulations. This is also a weakness because if we follow every rule and regulation, we are going to miss a lot of opportunities. One thing that I would like to see more of is teachers with “grit.”

When I was a teacher in Inglewood, California the Superintendent’s office was right at the top of the stairs, so he could see who was coming and who was going. If you walked by, he would put his head down, if he didn’t want to talk with you. But, if he wanted to talk with you, he would gesture for you to come in. As a classroom teacher. I was taking a reading course. I asked the Superintendent if I could take the students out of their routine reading and encourage choice and free reading I shared how I went to the library and they provided us a box of books for the students to read. He looked at me remembering I was a first year teacher, and said, “Yes, you can do that and I look forward to the results.” The assignment I had for my Reading Research class with Dr. Opstad, and I am amazed I still remember his name from 1960 at California State in Long Beach. I listed all the books our students had read and I submitted a formal paper.

On the day that I reported, I brought three of my students with me and they talked about their free reading. Afterwards Dr. Opstad said to me: “You showed grit. What made you think you could bring those kids to class?” I said: ‘I didn’t ask, I just brought them’. So, I think part of my behavior was grit and then part of it was courage and risk taking. The program made a big difference in the achievement of the students. They were in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and their Reading on the California Achievement Test ranged from grade 4-8.

**TSY:** *Do you think still we are suffering from some weaknesses in gifted education?*

**DS:** The biggest weakness we have is our identification procedures. We still rely on a cut-off score on an IQ test and we miss many underachieving gifted students, particularly our minority and diverse students. Some students never even get to be nominated, because the teacher thinks that a gifted child is the one who gets all the high grades, who does assignments, who is quiet, and behaves. In reality, we have gifted kids who don't do everything; they're bored and they have learned to slow down. Teachers do not nominate those students as possible gifted students. Our identification procedures need to be changed. I would like to see opportunity classes in every school, and then employ the RTI that is used in Special Education in which a group of teachers get together and say: "Have you seen Sammy recently?" The teachers share his strengths and weaknesses. The teachers can then tailor activities and strategies to focus on his strengths. Eventually, this student could be nominated for the gifted program.

**TSY:** *But are you in favor of special schools for the gifted? You remember you've been in one of them, as I told you in Jordan.*

**DS:** I am in favor of special schools for the gifted, I am in favor of special classes for the gifted, and I am in favor of cluster groups for the gifted. Also, I'm in favor of parents teaching their gifted children at home. There are many fine multiple ways of providing education for gifted students. For example, when a student who is profoundly gifted as Stephanie Tolan calls them, they aren't going to fit into a regular school. They may need to go to college early or go to a special school. There is a fantastic special school for gifted in California: the Mirman School. They have gifted students who are 4 and 5 years above grade level in achievement, and they differentiate the curriculum for the students.

**FB:** *What advice do you have to the conference attendees?*

**DS:** When I was attending a conference recently, one of my colleagues asked me "why do you go to these conferences, and go to all these sessions?" I responded because I still have something to learn, in fact a lot to learn. One suggestion I would make to conference attendees is to fold a sheet of paper in three parts, and on one side, jot down the points that you want to remember, and on the second folded side, the things you just plain don't understand and add little question marks to remind you that you need to research those points. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> fold, list ways you can apply this new information.

After a session, you will have a list of information of what you have learned, things that you didn't understand, and some information or strategies that you can apply. I use this strategy with my graduate students when I attend conferences with them. I seldom read that I don't write all over the book. I am reading a text that someone send me, and if there's a word that I don't understand, I underline it and look it up afterwards. As Carl Rogers said, we are all in the process of becoming, and I'd like the conference people to remember that statement, they are in the process of becoming!

**SS:** *Excellent. What are your plans for this next year?*

**DS:** This next year I have promised Tom Kemnitz our editor from Royal Fireworks that I would write another book on mindfulness. The one I wrote with Michelle Kane *Planting Seeds of Mindfulness* was a good beginning, but I would like to write another one on mindfulness for teachers, parents, and business people. Maybe it could be called *Planting Seeds of Mindfulness for Everyone*. Belle Wallace, John Senior and I just finished editing a phenomenal handbook on gifted education published by SAGE. The Sage *Handbook of Gifted and Talented* has 41 chapters of international authors, and the response to this book has motivated me to start writing!!!

**TSY:** *Can you shed some light on these two books that you already have in front of you?*

**DS:** I've traveled all over the world talking about the book *Spiritual Intelligence: Developing Higher Consciousness*. I wrote this with E. Paul Torrance.

**TSY:** *And last year you have been in Jordan.*

**DS:** Jordan, yes, and that was a wonderful opportunity to share the concept of higher consciousness and the theory of spiritual intelligence with your educators in your school for the gifted. The teachers asked many deep questions as they tried to see how spiritual intelligence could be integrated in their curriculum. I also presented at ECHA in Dublin, Ireland on spiritual intelligence, and mindfulness. There is considerable interest in spiritual intelligence, but there is an ever growing interest in mindfulness which is an essential part of spiritual intelligence. Before Paul Torrance and I wrote *Spiritual Intelligence: Developing Higher Consciousness* in 2001, we discussed how gifted students struggle with the deep questions of *Why are we here?*

*What is my purpose?* These questions are essential in spiritual intelligence. When Paul and I talked with different people about writing a book about spiritual intelligence, we received many different controversial reactions. Many people also reminded us that Howard Gardner didn't include spiritual intelligence in his multiple intelligences. So, Paul and I decided to ignore Howard Gardner's decision to not bother with spiritual intelligence because as he said, there are no universal values. Paul and I vigorously disagreed with that statement; indeed, I believe that there are universal values.

Paul and I used the same format that Gardner used to formulate his multiple intelligences. We examined the field of psychology, Science, and ancient wisdom to form a foundation for the concept of spiritual intelligence. Much of Physics was so relevant, with the different theories of multiple universes, and in researching ancient wisdom, we studied the wisdom of the Essenes. The Essenes were people who lived during the time that Jesus lived, and there is speculation that Jesus studied with the Essenes. The Essenes said while we are here, we are supposed to develop our talents and strengths and then give these back. I remember thinking, 'Holly Smoke, that is gifted education'. Our Spiritual Intelligence book was a book of love. I wrote a chapter for James Ogunleye who compiled chapters lauding the work of Paul Torrance.

Writing this book was truly a journey of intellectual discovery and love reflected in our warm and deep companionship. The book has a chapter listing the traits of spiritual intelligence, and strategies that teachers can use to further develop the spiritual intelligence of gifted students. In Texas, there's a big emphasis on reflective thinking, and reflective thinking is very much a useful skill in developing one's spiritual intelligence. The book *Planting Seeds of Mindfulness* with Michele Kane as co-author came out in 2018 and it examines the art and science of mindfulness. It explores mindfulness as a tool to develop spiritual intelligence.

**TSY:** *Do you think there is room for spiritual intelligence when we were talking about for example STEM and the STEAM and all these new trends which used to be interdisciplinary? Is there room for spiritual intelligence?*

**DS:** One of the characteristics of spiritual intelligence is seeing the connectedness between not only people, but to our environment, to the animals, and to the universe. Once you start talking about connectedness to the universe, then you begin to ponder where the universe began. When you ponder these deep questions and thoughts, you get involved in something that is so much bigger than the individual. I think a lot of gifted students (particularly the adolescents), desperately need to see STEM identifying and solving problems of awe. Stephen Hawking's famous comment of "when I find out the answer to the origin of the universe, I will be looking at the face of God," is important to note. He was very definitely one of our greatest scientists. So, yes, I think spiritual intelligence can be vital part of STEM.



**TSY:** *That means that it is more associated also with potential creativity.*

**DS:** Definitely, the creative part of you calls for you to give back your talent, as the ancient Essenes believed. If I'm connected to people, then I want to make a difference. Sometimes when I'm asked to do a presentation, I will share examples of gifted children that have, for whatever reason, been so touched by what is going on in their life that they had to give back. One young girl listened to her brother, who was on a Mormon mission in Jordan talking about children being cold during winter and not having blankets. So, she bought a blanket kit and started making blankets. She encouraged her friends to make blankets They sent over hundreds of blankets. This girl used her creativity and desire to make a difference and she did!

**TSY:** *Dorothy, you were involved in making the World Council and many other organizations. As you know, Prof. Dr. Fred A. Bonner II and his team including Dr. Stella L. Smith and other people have created what we call MACH III. So now we have MACH III, we have ICIE, we have other institutions around the world. How might these organizations, collectively, impact the field of creativity, giftedness, and talent development?*

**DS:** Institutions could cohost conferences and provide a project competition for teachers and students to identify problems and design a solution. The winners would have a scholarship for registration and travel to attend the conference and present their results. Each teacher has the potential of being an investigator and the students can be investigators as well. We have documentation of wonderful examples of teachers using problem-based learning and performing quite well on the state tests instead of worksheets. Indeed, teachers do develop challenging units addressing significant problems, but these need to be disseminated more widely. The organizations could make these materials available perhaps online. This would definitely influence the expansion of problem based learning and hands -on activities.

**TSY:** *And also, you were talking about the connection. We are collaborating because we would like to cross the borders, we would like to have more international collaboration and we would like to make it more global. Because we rely more on education to strengthen connections between different cultures and different populations.*

**DS:** Collaboration can come through the network systems and we need to identify ones that are interested in global collaboration and gifted education. I wrote an article discussing mindfulness and its effect on leadership. I submitted it to an international journal and they received so many hits on it that they sent it off to medical journals. There was considerable interest in examining the effects of mindfulness on anxiousness in kids. So, I think we have people in other disciplines that we can collaborate with, we just need to identify them.

**TSY:** *Yes, from different disciplines.*

**DS:** Yes, exactly.

**FB:** *You mentioned that the identification process is one of the critical issues in gifted education, but are there other critical issues in gifted education that you believe need to be addressed?*

**DS:** One critical issue is that educators are afraid of acceleration. They think if they accelerate a gifted child, the youngster will not have friends. And, the sad part is that he/she may not have any friends anyway! If you are a gifted kid, two years ahead of the rest of your class, and you are in the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, you are not the most favorite person. Yet, that youngster could study with 7<sup>th</sup> Graders and do fine. At the University of South Florida, I tested a little girl whose mother was one of my students in the Master's program. The child was seven, and had a high score of 150 on the Stanford Binet test. So, I said to the mother, 'I think we need to accelerate her from 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade.' She said: "You mean place her in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade?": and I said 'No, 4<sup>th</sup>'. We put her in 4<sup>th</sup> Grade, and you would never think that she wasn't a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student since she was a tall girl,

and very self-confident. Therefore, when you plan to accelerate, you need to look at the size of the youngster and their social and emotional development. We just don't use acceleration as a program adaptation. The negative research on acceleration is just not there. You have to look at the context and the whole picture of the student.

**SS:** *But there is much positive research. You remember the report that was done by Nicholas Colangelo and other people. So, there is a lot of research saying that acceleration is a must and it is needed for many gifted students.*

**DS:** But educators don't apply this information to gifted students' education. The major reason they don't implement acceleration is their attitude and fear of it.

**TSY:** *Maybe is it a political issue?*

**DS:** I don't think it is a political issue. I think it is an issue related to the myths about acceleration and a lock step mindset of grade level and chronological age.

**TSY:** *And they are not in favor of this. Because if we think about cost effectiveness and to meet the needs of the gifted, he or she should be accelerated.*

**DS:** Acceleration doesn't have to be grade skipping. For instance, if I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> Grader and doing 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Math, maybe I could go to the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade class, take Math with them, and then come back to my class. The first year I taught 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in Garden, Grove California my national reading test results indicated I had a student, Barbara Blaha, at the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade level of reading achievement. Barbara did free reading of books of her choice, and then decided how she would like to share what she learned from her reading with the class. She came to visit me last year in Texas. She called and said: "Do you remember me? I am Barbara Blaha." I told her that of course I remembered her. Barbara invited me to lunch with her two sons, and we talked about our 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class and the things she remembered. At that time, we had a paper caterpillar with segments, and every time a student read a book we added a segment. We had that caterpillar running wild all around the classroom. The principal would not consider acceleration, but Barbara was able to enter college early and now, she is an executive in Disneyland.

**TSY:** *But do you think that the alternative will be introducing integrative programs, for teaching thinking skills for example? As an alternative?*

**DS:** It would definitely be a meaningful activity for gifted students to introduce thinking skills such as Belle Wallace's TASC program.

**TSY:** *A number of activities in different frameworks. Teaching for creative thinking, critical thinking, creative problem solving, future problem solving, communication, and collaboration.*

**DS:** Teaching creative and critical thinking does meet the gifted students' needs and it works quite well in advanced curriculum, with activities differentiated in terms of input, the content, and strategies and the output or product. This would incorporate the Universal Design for Learning, which would be great way to integrate different frameworks.

**FB:** *Of course. You were also talking about emotional differentiation. I think you were the first to introduce this type of differentiation. Can you tell us more?*

**DS:** I felt like a lonely voice talking about the emotional needs of gifted for years with most of the emphasis placed on their intellectual needs. One problem with gifted students is that they can hide their gift to get along with others. Gifted girls often say: 'I don't say a lot in class because boys don't like smart girls, and they hide their gift'. Gifted boys hide their gift because they

don't want to be thought of as the teacher's pet. In some cultures it is not cool to be smart. Another emotional problem for gifted students is the perfectionism that many of them demonstrate. When I was teaching middle school Language Arts and my gifted students would be writing an essay, I would hear "scrunch, scrunch" and a paper would land on the floor. Oftentimes, as I would pick it up, read it and say to the student: 'You know what, let's call this a first draft.' To introduce the idea of a first draft, I asked a friend who was an author to share how sometimes she writes one page ten times! They were shocked, but I had less papers being thrown away. Anxiety is another emotional issue with many gifted students who are perfectionists and have parents who have really high expectations of them. One of my online teachers said a boy cried because he got an B+ and she said she didn't understand that. I sent an email back to her and said that B+ to him is like an F to you because he wants to be perfect. If I were that teacher, I would let him redo the paper, and I would not deduct the points. Yet many teachers will say 'If you let him do it again, you should deduct the points', or if it is a late assignment you should deduct points. I think we need to be more flexible with sensitive gifted students. We need to be aware that we are dealing with students' psyche as well as their intellectual ability.

**SS:** *So, what are the most significant contributions made by the first generation of gifted scholars, that first wave of gifted scholars. What are their most significant contributions?*

**DS:** Of the scholars of the students that I had or the people who are in gifted education?

**SS:** *Your colleagues in gifted education.*

**DS:** I think probably one of the most significant contributions that has been made by my colleagues is in curriculum development. Notably the work of Joyce Van Tassel-Baska at William and Mary University, through the Javits Grants. Also the contribution of Joe Renzulli with the University of Connecticut Research Institute for over 30 years should be noted. That institute publishes research reports on a regular basis to keep the field up to date. Joe has had a profound effect on the understanding of the nature of gifted and potentially gifted students with his definition of above average intelligence, creativity and task commitment.

Sandra Kaplan, Irving Sato and James Curry contributed through the Leadership Training Institute (LTI) bringing the latest curriculum development and innovative strategies to their participants. In fact, many of the strategies and curriculum our colleagues have developed in gifted education are now being implemented in regular education. Several of my gifted colleagues have said we need to develop some new activities and curriculum. Maybe that could be accomplished with mindfulness to meet the social and emotional needs of gifted students.

**TSY:** *I have another question relating to what my friends' question. We saw that in gifted education we have more female scholars than male. And this is different from other disciplines. Especially when we talk about Physics, for example, or Chemistry or other natural sciences. In gifted education we have more female scholars. Why?*

**DS:** I don't know that I have an answer for that. Indeed we do have many female scholars in gifted education including: Joyce Van Tassel-Baska, Sandra Kaplan, Alexenia Baldwin, Sally Reis, Carolyn Callahan, Barbara Clark, Stephanie Tolan, Nancy Robinson, Belle Wallace, June Maker, Julia Roberts, Maria Helena Novaes de Mira, Zenita Guenther, Erica Landau, Joan Freeman and Dorothy Sisk. Many of these female scholars were gifted themselves or had children who were gifted, so they had a keen understanding of the need for gifted education. We are trying to close that gender gap in the natural sciences by introducing young girls to Physics, and Biochemistry early in same sex summer institutes. One of my colleagues Otilia Urbina has held highly successful motivating camps in coding with 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls.

**FB:** *But still, there is a limited number.*

**DS:** Females don't go into Physics sometimes because they are fearful of mathematics and when you start talking about Physics, they step aside. Teaching science in a hands-on format and getting undergraduate students in research early has been very successful in increasing the number of girls in science classes and seeking science as a major. We are doing some exciting work in stimulating undergraduate research and holding conference where the students can present their studies here at Lamar University.

**TSY:** *Do you think women sacrifice more? You were talking about contribution; there might be a reason behind that. They are raising a family and they may be doing other things.*

**DS:** Yes, I am keenly aware of that sacrifice with women who are in my online class. They are teaching during the day, they go home, and they are a parent, and a wife. Then they are working on my online class for five weeks. That can be a real problem for females who need to learn self-regulation skills and time management. One technique that I share is to collaborate whenever possible and ask for help. It is also important to delegate tasks in order to maximize whatever you do with good planning.

**TSY:** *Another question. You have been working with a number of scholars. Can you tell us some memories about this people? You have mentioned James Gallagher, you have mentioned Paul Torrance and other people. What memories stand out? We would like to hear more from you.*

**DS:** James Gallagher is probably one of the key people in gifted education, because he had one foot in Special Education and the other in Gifted Education. He was very concerned about twice exceptional children. He was Assistant Secretary of Education when I was in Washington D.C. directing the Office of Gifted and Talented and I saw his ability to work with Congress. He had the reputation of being honest and straight forward in his talking and thinking. I saw him at that level, and then he became President of the National Association for Gifted Children. In fact, the way he became President of the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) is interesting. Julian Stanley was supposed to be the next president but he had too many competing demands at the time. I suggested calling Jim Gallagher. While other board members were skeptical of Jim's willingness to take on the leadership role, Jim agreed to be president for the National Association of Gifted Children. Jim was the kind of person who when he saw a need, he would step up to fill that need. He was truly a servant leader. One story about Julian is that he loved to have his colleagues come to his house and his wife would bake cookies for all of us. She was just the most wonderful, and supportive person that Julian needed. When she died, that was really a difficult time for him. He married a second time to an educator who was an administrator at Johns Hopkins University, and they had a strong intellectual bond. At her death, Julian moved into a residential retirement facility and he surprised me with a telephone call telling me he had found a girlfriend and her name was Dorothy.

**TSY:** *When he was around 80?*

**DS:** Yes, he was well into his 80's. They ended up getting married and when I asked him about it, he said that when he asked her why she had never married. She told him "I was waiting for you." I thought that was a splendid answer. Their marriage in late life represented a perfect example of how Julian explored life to its fulfillment.

**TSY:** *What about Paul Torrance?*



**DS:** Torrance was an absolutely wonderful person. In his later years, he suffered from diabetes, and its resulting complications. One fear that Paul had was that people would forget him and he repeated that over and over to me towards the end of his life, saying, “They are going to forget ‘what I have done and what I have contributed.’” I said: ‘No, everyone is going to remember what you are doing and have done.’ When he passed, it was right after our Spiritual Intelligence book was published, and one of his family members came up and said: “We always knew, that even though he talked about creativity, what he was really talking about was the spiritual nature of a person who is creative.” Paul had a beautiful white cat named Princess; towards the end of his life, his graduate student (who lived in the basement of Paul’s home) took Princess into the hospital under his jacket. Princess immediately jumped on Paul’s chest and stayed there with him until a nurse noticed her. When Paul died, he left his house to his graduate student with the understanding that he would take care of Princess.

I also have fond memories of Pansy who was one of Paul’s students at the University of Minnesota. Pansy loved to tell us how she was sitting in class and thinking ‘I want to marry him.’ So, she made little spaghetti dinners and invited him over for dinner. I guess, he must have been...in his late 60-ies when they married. Pansy traveled all over with Paul to his conferences. One of my favorite memories is watching Paul and Pansy in Key West at a Whole Brain Conference with Ned Herrmann. They were walking on the beach holding hands and in deep conversation. Great people!

**FB:** *What roles should higher education play in gifted education?*

**DS:** You mean like graduate classes?

**FB:** *Maybe graduate programs.*

**DS:** Sometimes Higher Education is not our best friend. One of the problems that we sometimes have, particularly here in Texas is if you have a graduate class in Gifted and you don’t have 15 students in the class, they don’t want to offer the class. If you are not teaching several classes, you may not have a job. I’ve watched really outstanding professors lose their position in different universities. I am an endowed chair and I am teaching online classes in the Special Education Program. I have provided a Texas Governor's Program each year at since 1990. There is one at North Texas, and the University of Texas in Austin has been providing one as well. These programs provide higher education visibility People in gifted education have to produce. For example, Vanderbilt professors provide programs for younger students on Saturdays and they have summer programs for gifted students. We have to sort of “bootleg” our existence, and we shouldn't have to do that.

Also, if your state doesn’t have certification for the gifted, then teachers can teach gifted students without classes in gifted or a degree in gifted education. At the University of South Florida where I was for 20 years, the state of Florida had certification requirements for teaching gifted. If you wanted to teach gifted students, you had to have 12 hours in gifted education, and if you enrolled in 12 hours, we could motivate you into getting a Masters degree in gifted education. So most of our teachers were enrolled in the MA program and many of them went on to get Doctorates. Several of them are university professors

**FB, SS, TSY:** *So, we would like to conclude this interview and I would like to give you the opportunity to say few words to the audience and to the people who will watch this interview, or read it later on in our journal.*

**DS:** First of all forgive me for talking more openly about my colleagues than I should have, but I tried to do it with compassion and love. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and I would urge you to look at yourself and reflect on who you are, and who you want to be. Your potential is

phenomenal. I love the idea of saying 'not yet.' If you have not developed a certain skill, think that you haven't developed it yet. All of us are always in the process, as Carl Rogers said, of "becoming." Explore! Explore ideas that perhaps threaten you. When you are searching for something to read, reach out to a topic that is new to you. Look at other disciplines! Try to stay in a receptive mode; for example, when people are talking to you, use your "deep listening" and think how you could apply what they are sharing. You will have many opportunities at the conference to learn from others. And then think about the next conference where you can present your work. Hopefully this conference will enrich your content knowledge, skills and introduce new directions for you.