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Interview

Interview with Dr. Seokhee CHO About Gifted Education and Its Future

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study, which is a major name in the education of gifted Dr. Cho 's about gifted education is to put forward their views. Dr. Seokhee Cho is a Professor at the School of Education, St. John's University. She is currently conducting three research projects funded by US Department of Education: Project HOPE as a Principal Investigator, Project WIN and Project LEADER as a research director.

Key words: Gifted education, special education, models**,** new approaches

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Mertol : Dear Dr. Cho You are so famous researcher for gifted child education. What should be the goal of gifted education? In other words, why should we provide special education for gifted students?

Dr. Cho: There are two reasons why we need to provide gifted education for students with exceptionally high potential or performance. First, their learning characteristics and needs are different from those of regular education students. They learn much faster and remember longer and more accurately. They can also understand complex concepts easily and concentrate for a long period. They can voluntarily generate strategies needed for effective learning. They learn better with open-ended and ill-defined problems even without explicit instructions. They need less number of repetitions and trainings to master the same skills or understand the same concepts than regular education students. They prefer complex contents, high level processes, and fast pacing. If we ignore their needs and expect them to learn in the same way as regular education students learn, they will be bored and start developing bad study habits. They will learn how to get by without working hard**.** When we realize that they have developed a bad study habit (e.g., not working hard), it is too late to reverse it. Second, we need leaders who can change the world for the better by solving many unprecedented challenges or problems in the future. The gifted students have high potential to develop such capacity to solve unprecedented problems creatively and improve various aspects of our society.

Mertol: What are the new approaches for the education of gifted students? (Could you please inform us about other countries which can be the best model of gifted student education?)

Dr.Cho: Each country has its own unique cultural, political, and social context for education. Therefore, it may not be possible to say which approach is the best for gifted education. However, if I look at the 'BEST' with two criteria, how much potential can be developed and how many children's potential can be developed; Renzulli's Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli and Reis, 1994) is the best. Why? First, it can be applied to all students. Secondly, creative productive of students can be nurtured the most. It is a comprehensive model which allows any kinds of grouping arrangements and curriculum with focus on developing creative productivity of children in addition to learning achievement. Maximum potential development can be achieved by acceleration and homogeneous grouping such as self-contained school or class for the gifted students only. However, such arrangements limit the number of gifted students to be served. Schoolwide Enrichment Model can be applied to all students in regular classes and also to gifted students studying in gifted classes and gifted schools as well. Therefore, it allows all types of services, but focus is always on students' creative productivity. It is a democratic approach which tries to recognize and nurture talents from as many children as possible**.**

Mertol: What are new approaches in the education of gifted students in academic area?

Dr. Cho: I think there are two new approaches in the education of gifted students.

Application of developmental concept of giftedness for identification and education: The concept of giftedness should be developmental. In other words, depending on the stage of the talent development, the target aspects for assessments should be adjusted. At each of the beginning, middle, and later stage of talent development, their potential, achievement, and eminence should be considered for identifying the gifted and talented respectively. Correspondingly, goals of gifted education should also be adjusted to high achievement and eminence at the middle and the late stage of talent development respectively.

The developmental concept of giftedness should also be applied for identification of gifted students among the under-represented groups of students whose giftedness and talent cannot be recognized easily by standardized tests. For a long time, it was believed that most of gifted children can be identified by some kinds of tests, if they are truly gifted. However, through many studies, it was found that there are gifted children whose talents cannot be recognized by tests because their potential has not been cultivated in culturally and/or economically disadvantaged environments or because the immigrant children cannot express their thoughts or ideas with the languages for testing. For the students whose potential cannot be assessed easily by a couple of hours of testing, it is necessary to provide them with transitionary educational programs and observe their learning behaviors during their participation in challenging programs.

Domain specific giftedness:

In the history of gifted education, general intelligence was thought to be the main criteria of giftedness. Once they are identified as gifted, they were thought to be gifted for their life time. Recently, more evidences which support the concept of talents in specific domains such as science, mathematics, or arts are accumulated. As students grow and their talents are more differentiated, it is necessary to tap their talents in specific domain and provide challenging programs in those specific domains. Especially for the students at the upper elementary or middle school level, it seems necessary to identify students in specific domains. Earlier than later identification of their talents in specific domains facilitate their development of the talent in that specific domain. Research shows that talents in mathematics, science, music, skating and gymnastics can be identified when children are young. In these domains, earlier the training begins, the higher the possibilities of achieving high are.

Mertol: Current initiatives in Turkey show that the gifted schools are opened for only gifted students. What do you think of only gifted school for giftedness?

Dr. Cho: I think the special school for the gifted only is the necessity for effective development of gifted students' talents in specific domains to the maximum, especially if they are operated for high school students. If this is a public school which provide independent studies, accelerated curriculum and projects through mentoring, many gifted students can get benefit from these high quality education programs for developing their talents. If specialized high schools for the gifted are established in the joint domains such as science and art, instead of one specific domain, it would be more useful for developing creativity of gifted students. However, I do not recommend specialized schools at the elementary and middle school levels. Why? Young gifted students have not fully developed their identity as gifted students yet. Lower half of the students in the specialized schools for the gifted only might lose their self-confidence by staying with much brighter students every day for some years. It is necessary for the gifted to have chances to get along with other children. By attending regular schools during their elementary and middle school periods, they can associate with other children and have chances to understand them better. During the elementary and middle school periods, it is recommended for young gifted students to provide challenging learning opportunities through pull-out program or enrichment cluster.

Mertol : What do you think about TURKEY and Turkish people?

Dr.Cho : Turkey shares many common features as Korea where I was born and lived for many years. The common features include a peninsula surrounded by the sea on three sides, a long history of battles, using Altaic language, and country's geostrategically important location. Especially, Turkey sent 5,453 military forces as a part of the United Nations Command to Korean War in 1950-1953. Many South Koreans remember the precious contribution from Turkey and South Koreans like Turkish people as their brothers and sisters. I travelled Turkey after attending the International Conference on Talent Development and Excellence in September, 2013 in Antalya including those cities of Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Konya, Ephesus, Pamukale, Cappadocia Underground city, to Derinkuyu underground city. I was amazed by the rich artistic and spiritual heritage from Hellenic, Roman, and Byzantine culture. With the great heritage, great land and passionate people, I felt a high potential of its full blossom in a very near future.

Mertol: Thanks for your kind effort.

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Editor's Note

Dr. Seokhee CHO is a Professor at the School of Education, St. John's University. She is currently conducting three research projects funded by US Department of Education: Project HOPE as a Principal Investigator, Project WIN and Project LEADER as a research director. She has written numerous books and articles on creative problem solving and gifted education. She has been the Director of National Research Center on Gifted Education in Korea, the President of Asia Pacific Federation of the World Council for the Gifted and Talented

(WCGTC), and a member of the Korean Presidential Advisory Council for Educational Innovation. She is currently serving as the Editor-in-Chief of the AP Journal of Gifted and Talented Education of the Asia Pacific Federation of WCGTC. She is also serving as the Review Board Member of the Gifted Child Quarterly, Gifted Education International, the Journal of Gifted/Talented Education by the Korean Society for the Gifted, and the Journal for the Education of Young Scientist and Giftedness (JEYSG).