

Challenges to the basis of giftedness and talent education

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While the notion of someone being extraordinary in the most positive of terms is ancient, the more contemporary understanding of giftedness and talented are mainly American with roots in the 1970s Cold War United States. Since then American scholarship has dominated giftedness and talent research and practice. Although research is now pursued globally for much the same reasons which once triggered it in the United States, it either follows, or is entirely built upon, American theories, models, practices, and more surprisingly, also American values irrespective of obvious cultural differences beyond American borders. With the emergence of big data, however, behavioural genetics, epigenetics, the continued revelations of evolutionary research—all of which have emerged in the natural sciences after the foundation of gifted American education—have left much, if not all, of the current research foundations on which giftedness and talent have been pursued wanting, if not being scientifically flawed altogether. As much as we wish to support gifted individuals by all means possible, few take into account that giftedness in the light of evolutionary dynamics is in fact dysfunctional. Scholars, practitioners and political leaders alike have remained uninformed of, or even insensitive to, the consequences of recent findings in other disciplines than education and psychology. This keynote will address a few of these findings which inevitably challenge gifted education as well as the largely American understanding of how giftedness and talent have been defined. The general ambition of the world economy to make every effort to harness talent worldwide for economic growth is an impossible one with little or no support in objective empirical research.