

World Affairs Council Scholar Award Summary

Christina Roth: 2017 World Gifted Conference

“Traveling. It leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller.” - IBN BATTUTA @PROJECTINSPO

First and foremost, I am forever grateful for the local donations from Wells Fargo, SunTrust, Bank of America,



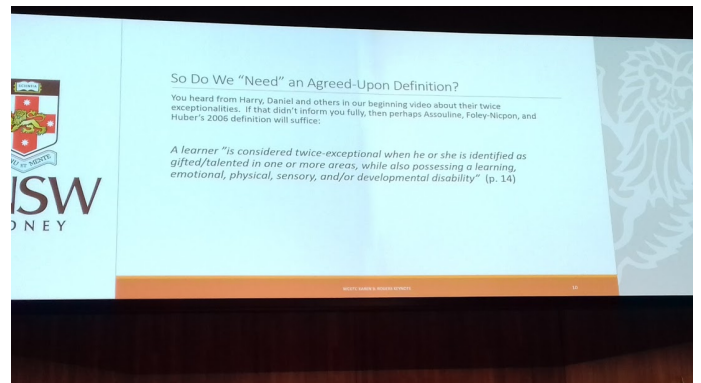
Carolinas Healthcare System, and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. My scholar award opportunity would not have existed without your immense generosity and passion for global educational experiences.

When I heard about the World Affairs Council Scholar Program I was immediately drawn to the mission of equipping educators with international experiences. As an avid reader and aspiring globetrotter, I hope to one day see

as much of the world as possible. I came across the 2017 World Gifted Conference during my research for the World Affairs Council Scholar application and knew that embarking upon a journey to Sydney, Australia to learn more about best practices in gifted education was a once-in-a-lifetime endeavor. Knowing that the biggest names and experts in gifted education would be gathered created an incredible amount of awe and anticipation in the days leading up to the conference.

Gifted Conference Highlights:

My goals going into the conference included gathering information on the newest trends in gifted education best practices, learning more about how gifted education looks around the world, and connecting with other gifted educators on a professional level. The conference more than exceeded my expectations. The worldwide aspect of the conference brought an interesting level of teacher “takeaways” and curriculum ideas, as well as a multitude of thesis and doctoral level research. I sat in on lectures given by professors that I once cited in my AIG Certification papers - the equivalent to meeting a famous person in the world of educational pedagogy! I also networked with various gifted educators and talked to numerous publishing companies about the future of gifted educational resources.



One session that truly hit a chord with me was the keynote address given by Karen Turner from the Javits Research Center who spoke about twice-exceptional (2E) students in gifted education. She spent a great deal of time researching at the BRIDGES School and discovered the uniqueness of those students who have difficulty being immersed in a traditional education setting because of their various social and emotional states. She urged listeners to consider **all** students when testing for giftedness, especially those who don't fit the typical characteristics. I found this keynote especially interesting because my district has recently piloted an initiative for increasing the awareness of 2E students and providing support for certifying these children. The carryover of this realization applies to those students who are also language learners (ELL's) and also deserve the opportunity to obtain gifted certification. Turner closes her keynote by sharing various resources for us to look into upon the return to our respective schools, and she "charged" us to keep an open mind during the certification process.

Throughout the duration of the conference the theme of general enrichment, or teaching all students at a level of enrichment, continually resurfaced. I attended a session with Kirsi Tirri from Helsinki, Finland and she mentioned that Finland has no official gifted education policy. The country values equality of all students, so gifted students are served in mixed ability settings and teachers learn to master the art of differentiation. She presented this concept as a holistic educational approach; insisting that we make sure to support creativity at all costs and allow children to grow and learn with intention. I hadn't even considered a district, let alone an entire country, that wouldn't have some sort of policy in place for gifted children. However, I met more and more educators who echoed what Tirri was talking about in her session.

Kensington Elementary School Visit:



Amazingly enough, I was able to visit a school right in the heart of Sydney, and they do not have a structured gifted program at all. I connected with Katherine Thompson from the Gifted Education Research Center (GERRIC) before planning my travel to Australia and she met me at

Kensington Public School one afternoon. This particular elementary school had recently received a new administrator (coincidentally Katharine's former colleague) and she allowed me to visit for an entire day!

I toured several classrooms and sat in on an upper elementary assembly that was completely run by the student body. Keeping in line with the cultural aspects, we stopped for a few minutes to chat over morning tea. The staff at Kensington stresses the importance of public speaking for students, and they even have a school debate team! They shared that although there isn't a strict gifted curriculum or program for the school, they are focused on enrichment for all students. The goal at Kensington is make sure that all students get the education they need and deserve. The support community surrounding Kensington is excellent and all parties come together when students are suspected with needing gifted testing or certification.



The world of gifted education is varied and vast - with as many similarities as there are differences. I learned so much more than I could have ever anticipated by traveling to Sydney, Australia in July. My professional mindset was stretched and my connections across the globe have been strengthened because of my journey.

(End of Original Two-Page Summary Report)

World Affairs Council Scholar Award Final Report

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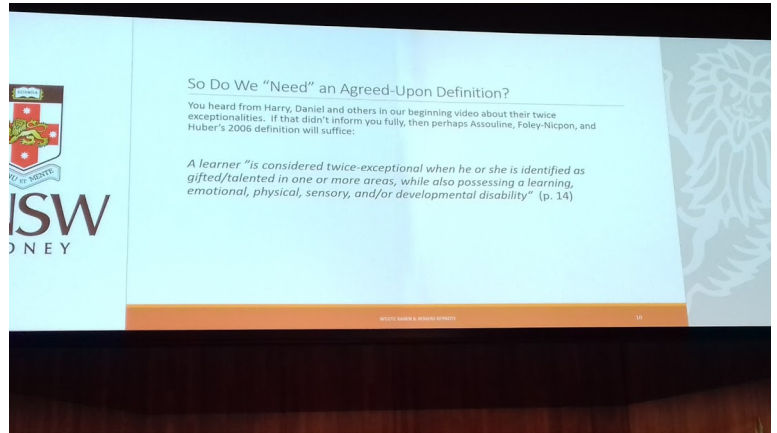
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Gifted Education for *ALL*:

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Gifted Educational Policy Around the Globe:

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Finland and Singapore, stating that “It was not cool to be good in school in Finland, but in Singapore it’s cool to be academic”.

Gifted Education in Australia & New Zealand:

As I networked with educators throughout the conference I confirmed that there is no “right” way of providing gifted services in our schools. What I did come to recognize is that it’s most important to be conscious of the intense need to meet the gifted student population where they are on their educational journey. Early on in the conference I met a middle school teacher, Anne-Marie, who works about two hours east of Sydney, at a private girls school. Anne-Marie mentioned that her students do not have access to a gifted teacher, let alone a full program dedicated to students with gifted characteristics. She was in awe of all the resources that were available in her home country and equally intrigued by my role as a Talent Development Teacher. We had lunch during two days of the conference and compared “notes” about the programs and policies available in our respective districts. Although our daily work experiences are completely different we did manage to find some connectedness in the simple fact that at the core we are advocates for our students.

While I was in the Oceania region, I took an additional trip after the conference to New Zealand to visit a former coworker, Tracey Gibson, who used to work in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools as a Visitng

International Faculty (VIF) member. She returned to her hometown of Tauranga, New Zealand several years ago, but invited me to visit her school while I was in the country so I could observe a school in New Zealand. She works at Papamoa College (equivalent to a secondary school in the U.S.) and teaches in what



they call “pods”. Tracey works with three other classroom teachers in a large quad area of the school building. It’s referred to as open classroom teaching, so there is no walls between classes and students and teachers are encouraged to collaborate often. They plan using interdisciplinary units, keeping in mind best practices about higher level thinking skills, inquiry, and academic discourse. Although she couldn’t speak for all of the other New Zealand schools, we had many discussions about the role of gifted education in her home country. She said

they do not push for gifted certification there, but they do encourage students to learn critical thinking skills at a young age and constantly incorporate higher level strategies in their lessons. I had the opportunity to talk with several of the students who attend her class and they mentioned feeling fully challenged and prepared for each of the projects or problem-based learning that takes place. I was in awe of the way the open classroom concept operates with such a large (60+) amount of middle school students in one space. The students were working in learning teams the day I observed and they had to analyze images that symbolized “hot topics” or controversial situations occurring in the world around us. They were respectful, fully engaged, and laser focused on the task. I walked away fully impressed with the model of open classroom instruction and immediately started to brainstorm ways to use that lesson within my own groups.

Advancements in STEM Education:

Jim Watters presented the opening keynote presentation with a critical question: Who will solve all of the world’s potential problems? He spoke to the urgent nature of our growing need for more Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math (STEM) educational practices. I loved his creative classroom applications for incorporating more S.T.E.M. lessons, such as using a putt-putt simulation for teaching angles in math class or using a local creek or stream to launch lessons on chemical composition in science. He used the term “intentionally interdisciplinary” to describe his approach for ensuring students gifted students are exposed to S.T.E.M. concepts and units.

In one of the breakout sessions, entitled “USA Model vs. Australia: A Cross-cultural Study”, a teacher from the Gatton Academy, a Kentucky S.T.E.M. academy, shared their success with cultivating a community built around academic enrichment and high expectations. They have been so successful that many of their high school students are taking only college courses; some of them completing up to 60 college credits before their graduation! In a separate breakout session, “Rich Math Tasks Across Grade Levels”, the presenters used the phrase “low floor, high ceiling” to bring forward the point that children need to stretch their thinking. It is okay to not know the answers and have to work hard to discover the solutions. The presenters shared scaffolded examples of the assignments and performance tasks which varied depending on the grade level in question.

Cultivating a Community of Problem-Solvers:

Perhaps my most favorite sessions throughout the conference were those dedicated to the area of problem-solving and project-based learning. I absolutely adored the speakers from The Grayson School in Philadelphia, PA. Their breakout was innovative, engaging, and replicable. I learned about archaeology and came away with a problem-based learning

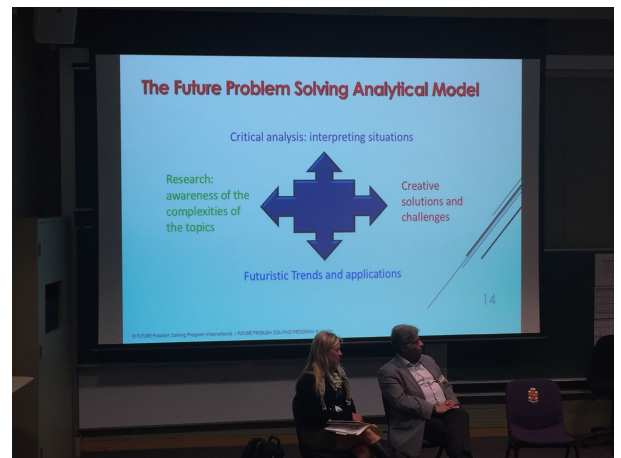
process that I could use with my own students. The presenters used lego reconstruction to capture our attention and coupled the real-world application with the research surrounding gifted education and problem-based learning. The Grayson School prides themselves on creating a place of “wonder” for their students, and ensuring students are “fiercely engaged” in the process and the content, so they can then create a great product. I was empowered by their statement that “ideally when you introduce a topic to children, no one in the room knows anything about it”. That’s a huge undertaking as an educator, but one challenge that I humbling welcome as I return to my school to create some engaging units.

Creativity and Engagement within Gifted Education:



I first learned about C. June Maker from my online gifted certification courses at UNCC. When I saw her name on the list of breakout sessions, I knew I had to hear her speak. She is known for her research on the concept of engagement in the classroom. Throughout her session she provided real-life lesson opportunities that would allow students to get involved and retain the information they are learning each day. My

favorite example was her project idea about teaching the rainforest by transforming the classroom into an actual rainforest environment filled with props and sensory opprotunities. The takeaway here is that emersing the children into the geographical location will allow them to live and breathe the content. Raising the bar on engagement also increases student criticial and creative thinking, and promotes an increase in student



confidence as they “problem-solve their way” through the unit. The wonderful thing about this engagement model is the students work through the content, product, and process as a cohort of mixed-ability levels. By maintaining a heterogenous group all children are learning at their level within their own classroom.

Kensington Public School Visit:



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to Australia and she met me at Kensington Public School one afternoon. This particular elementary school had recently received a new administrator (coincidentally Katherine’s former colleague) and she allowed me to visit for an entire day!

I toured several classrooms and sat in on an upper elementary assembly that was completely run by the student body. Keeping in line with the cultural aspects, we stopped for a few minutes to chat over morning tea. The staff at Kensington stresses the importance of public speaking for students, and they even have a school debate team! They shared that although there isn’t a strict gifted curriculum or program for the school, they are focused on enrichment for all students. The goal at Kensington is make sure that all students get the education they need and deserve. The community support surrounding Kensington is excellent and all parties come together when students are suspected with needing gifted testing or certification.

Enrichment Education at Kensington:



I spoke with Lanette, one of the assistant principals on campus, for quite some time the morning of my visit. When I initially met her she was teaching a first and second grade combination class. She mentioned that all

assistant principals at Kensington also teach a class of some sort, in addition to their administration duties and various curriculum responsibilities. She shared that students are placed into “year” categories according to age and grade level. The school holds students in Year 1-5, with the American equivalent being Grades K-5. Teachers meet at the beginning of the year to align all of the curriculum with their student product expectations, in order to create a longterm syllabus. She mentioned that this “ensures the children get what they need, regardless of the grade level or ability level”. They develop learning groups that span across grade levels and the learning groups consist of someone from each grade and subject area. I imagine these groups are simliar to what my school would refer to as vertical planning teams. The concept of enrichment and acceleration is just “understood” when teachers are planning for their courses and projects. They don’t talk about it, they just *do* it.

I asked Lanette if there were students who shared their time in cross-grade level groups, for one reason or another. She gave me some insight on a student named “Eddie” who is in Year 2, but functioning much higher than his classmates. In order to keep Eddie progressing forward and challenged they

allow him to visit higher grade levels and he also receives varied tasks than his general classmates. He was reading by age two and starting showing signs of giftedness in Kindergarten. His parents brought this to the attention of adminstration and they met with the school psychologist to make a plan for Eddie’s success.

Although he receives certain accomodations, Eddie has never been officially tested as academically gifted.

I had an opportunity to help co-teach a class with one of the upper elementary teachers for a few moments during my visit. The students were learning about how to break apart complex numbers using place value strategies. They were allowed to choose the format for solving the problems and before sharing with the teacher the students had to consult with one other student to be sure their solution was correct.



It was interesting to see that even a world away from my home, children use similar concepts just in a slightly different manner and with alternate resources.

Putting Practice into Action:

I have current plans to present at the local and state level, with applications in progress at this time. I will be creating professional development highlighting the research strategies that I learned throughout the conference.

The professional development themes include: **Enrichment and Global Education** and **Gifted Practices in the General Classroom**. Both of these presentations are still a work in progress, but I am using much of my research and notes from the 2017 World Gifted Conference, including my experience at Kensington Public School and the geographical exploration throughout my travels.

Growing Gifted Learners:



One component of my initial proposal involved finding a way to include parents in more of the gifted services protocol and school communication. As a teacher within the Advanced Studies Department at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools I was given the opportunity to volunteer at our recent *Growing Gifted Learners* parent workshop on

October 28, 2017. The workshop, including student and parent breakout sessions, including a keynote session from Dr. Michael Matthews of the gifted certification program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Parents rotated through sessions for elementary, middle, and high school gifted students and the children took part in breakout sessions with enrichment activities.

Using some of the enrichment strategies I learned at the 2017 World Gifted Conference, I led a session for K-2 students using tangrams and creative engagement. Our goal, as a district, is to make sure this event is a yearly experience in order to keep the lines of communication open between parent, schools, and gifted teachers.

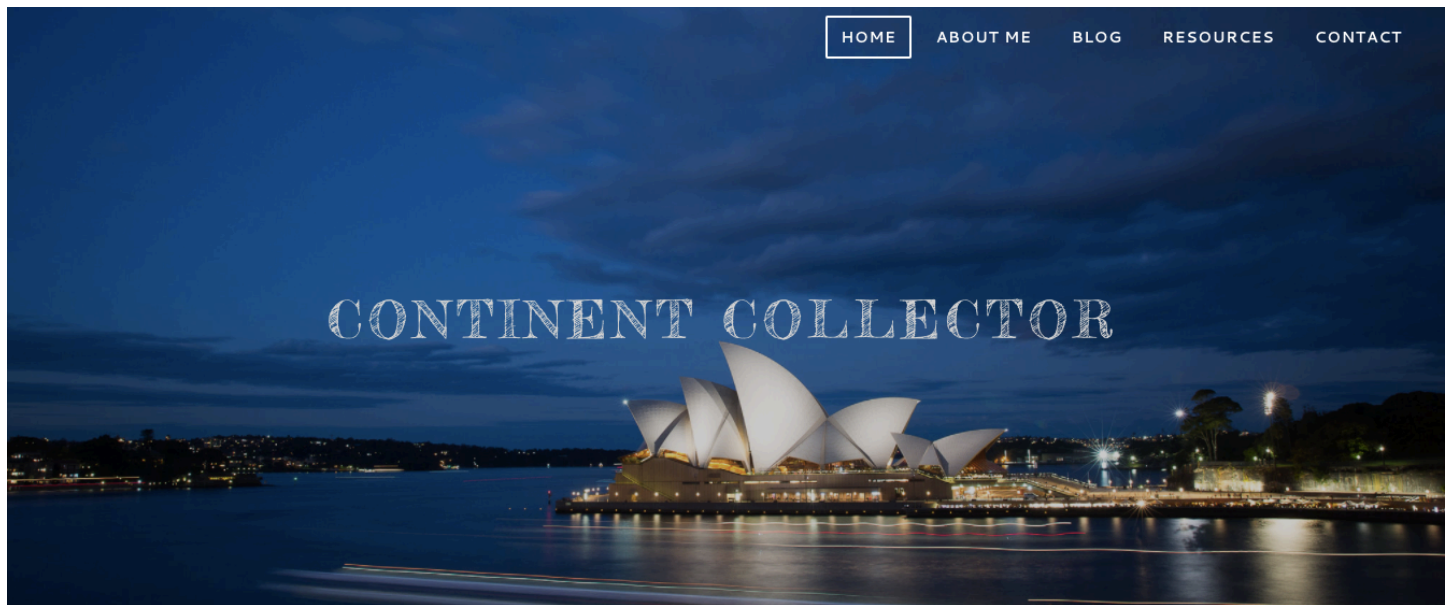


I have also created a schedule for professional development at my current schools. At Oaklawn Language Academy I spend Mondays rotating through classrooms in grades 2-5 showcasing gifted resources and activities that I have developed for the teachers and students. Teachers sign up for the professional development and they spend the sessions



observing me as I teach their students. The goal with this professional development is to make sure students are receiving highly engaging lessons, with higher level questioning strategies and academic conversations. Ideally the teachers will be interested in joining forces to co-teach with me in the future. This would allow for growth of the gifted program at my school, and provide students with regular exposure to gifted teaching strategies.

Technology and Globally Gifted:



I am currently in the process of using all of the images and resource materials I gathered from the 2017 World Gifted Conference, as well as travel throughout Australia and New Zealand, to create a student and teacher-friendly online resource. This website will include lesson plans, a blog, and integrated Google Classroom forums. The website will be called Continent Collector (<https://continentcollector.weebly.com>) and fully dedicated to bringing more global awareness into my classroom and beyond. At the moment, I am working on several blog posts that will provide my students and my school community with a glimpse of what it was like

being in Australia for the conference, including many cultural components that differ from living in the United States. I gathered research from the Blue Mountain region of Australia, as well as the Great Barrier reef. My hope is that this resource will continue to grow as we encounter more and more information about various countries and cultural experiences during the school year.

Cultural Exploration:

My experience in Australia was one eye opening experience after another. I was not prepared for the deep historical connections that the local Australians feel towards their Aboriginal ancestors. At least every other session I attended at the 2017 World Gifted Conference included opening remarks with a phrase or a series of comments geared towards the elders of the community and the native people. I have attended many educational conferences throughout my career, although almost all of them in the United States, and this was a refreshing reminder that the reason we are here today is because of those who have gone before us to pave the way.

After the conference I also traveled north to the Queensland region of Australia, where I encountered completely different scenery and a mecca of geographical features. The Great Barrier Reef was breathtaking



and a truly unforgettable experience. My tour guide shared insight about the destruction that took place after the recent tsunami and horrible weather that the eastern coast experienced in previous years. Although the reef life and surrounding beaches are still recovering, we were able to

tour several beaches within the reef and explore using snorkeling gear. During the tour and the water exploration experience I kept thinking about how amazing it will be to share what I have witnessed with my students. It was that moment when it finally hit me that I was interacting with a part of the world that I had only seen in pictures; it was the globe coming to life right in front of my eyes. This feeling of “real” became even more clear when I toured a geothermal village in Rotorua, New Zealand. I witnessed a traditional Maori dance and



storytelling experience, and watched geysers explode in rhythm with the expansion and contraction of the Earth's surface. The cultural heritage of Australia and New Zealand are quite different and yet unique to the Oceania region of our world. As I continue to develop my website resource, my priority will be to make sure the students I reach have an opportunity to view my pictures, hear my stories, and research for themselves. When we prepare for this year's multicultural fair I plan to partner with the grade level that chooses Oceania – it will be incredible to provide my firsthand cultural account.

Final Thoughts:

A solid theme that surfaced again and again throughout the conference was creating an environment where children have a sense of “psychological safety”. This psychological safety was defined as the phenomenon whereby people feel free to share their ideas, while having some choice, autonomy, competence and connectedness – while maintaining the ability to make change happen if necessary. The world of gifted education is varied and vast - with as many similarities as there are differences. As educators and academics we must maintain that sense of safety, while allowing for change. Just as the world is ever-changing, so is my practice as a gifted educator. I learned so much more than I could have ever anticipated by traveling to Sydney, Australia (and beyond) in July. My professional mindset was stretched and my connections across the globe have been strengthened because of my journey.