

Interview (3):

Kirsi Tirri

Taisir Subhi Yamin

The International Centre for Innovation in Education (ICIE)

Dr. Kirsi Tirri is an internationally renowned leader in gifted education and talent development. Her research initiatives in Finland and worldwide explore important scholarly themes in teacher education, school pedagogy, moral and religious education, talent development, gifted education, and cross-cultural studies. Dr. Tirri is a Full Professor of Educational Sciences at the University of Helsinki. She is also a Visiting Professor at St. John's University, New York, USA. Dr. Tirri has been the President of ECHA (European Council for High Ability) for the years 2008-2012, the President of the SIG International Studies at AERA (American Educational Research Association) for the years 2010-2013 and the President of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters for the years 2016-2017. She was a Research Director at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies for the years 2017-2019. She has published widely in international educational journals and books on teacher education, moral education and gifted education. She also serves on the Editorial Boards of 13 educational journals.



Taisir Subhi Yamin (TSY):

Can you explain what motivated you to enter the field of gifted and talented education?

Kirsi Tirri (KT)

In Finland we have not had official gifted education and we don't really talk about gifted students. My family visited the US in early 1990. My two daughters attended elementary school in Indiana and my eldest daughter was identified as gifted in an American school based on her academic achievements in standardized tests. Her teacher suggested that we put her to the gifted programme within the same school. This was the starting point for me to study gifted education. I wanted to explore the different options in the field to meet the needs of gifted and talented students. I also became interested in the culture-dependency in the conceptualization and identification of giftedness. I had the opportunity to learn the field at Purdue University as a visiting scholar hosted by Prof. John Feldhusen. My first publication was published in 1994 in the *Journal of Gifted and Talented International* where Dr. Feldhusen was the chief editor at the time.

My challenges have been related to the Finnish educational ethos where giftedness is often a taboo topic. I have had to explain that the field does not mean an elitist approach in education, and we see giftedness as developmental and culture dependent. There are many definitions of giftedness and many different approaches to support talent development of diverse students.

I have served gifted education internationally as a President of ECHA (European Council for High Ability) for the years 2008-2012. I have also served in many editorial boards of gifted education journals and attended conferences and published regularly on the topic in international journals and books. I have supervised international doctoral students and helped them to complete their dissertations in the field of gifted education. I think my biggest achievements are related to making the field visible with my publications, supervision, and international positions in the field. My contributions also include development of self-assessment instrument to evaluate multiple intelligences. I published a book of the measurements on multiple intelligences and moral sensitivities in education that I have developed with my colleague Professor Petri Nokelainen (<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-94-6091-758-5>) and we have a recent publication using this instrument with gifted upper-secondary students in physics (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02783193.2021.2005205?journalCode=uror20>).

TSY:

Can you describe or identify the types of knowledge and skills that researchers in gifted education should have?

KT:

I wish the researchers in our field would have more wisdom on how to communicate giftedness in different cultural contexts. I also hope we could value both quantitative and qualitative approaches in our research. We need multiple perspectives, variety of concepts and methods to perform good quality research in gifted education and talent development.

TSY:

Can you please explain some of the strengths and limits of gifted education?"

KT:

The strengths are related to the ability to help diverse students to fulfil their potential. We have developed great methods in differentiation and acceleration of education. The weaknesses are in the conceptual area. We should find ways to talk about gifted education in the ways that don't turn people away with the expression that we promote elitist education or something very narrow and selected approach that is not inclusive.

TSY:

What are your plans for the next year and the near future?

KT:

I am a senior scholar and I have many responsibilities in supervising, mentoring, and reviewing research. I serve in many national and international advisory boards, and I evaluate research proposals for many research councils. I still enjoy writing and I try to author a few articles per year in addition to the articles I co-author with my doctoral and post-doctoral students.

I have supervised 30 dissertations of students from 11 different countries. I really enjoy international co-operation and different cultures. I can't choose any individual person I want to mention but my visits to give guest lectures and supervise and review doctoral dissertations for example in the Netherlands, Sweden and Arab Emirates, have been very fulfilling experiences with rich cultural experiences.

TSY:

Thank you so much for this interview.

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