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A Message From the Guest Editor—Looking at Giftedness Through a Wide Angle Lens

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Our task is to look at the world and see it whole.
—E. F. Schumacher

Special educators have long pondered the question, “what is giftedness,” or what may be a more appropriate way of addressing the issue, “what makes giftedness?” With this issue of *Exceptionality*, my colleagues and I attempt to shed some light on a number of dualities as they relate to students who exhibit gifted behaviors. Specifically, this issue provides a glimpse into the diversity of giftedness. Each article asks us to question how we view gifted students, how we characterize the attributes of gifted students, and how we as educators can create a system to better meet the individual needs of gifted learners.

Beginning with an updated definition of giftedness that focuses on the identification of certain behaviors and provides a rationale for the talent development of gifted students, guest articles illustrate how a label of *gifted* may not be the only classification for a given student. The federal definition of giftedness, which made its first appearance in 1978, has stood the test of time with minor revisions and provides a rationale for the concept of the development of gifted behaviors rather than the labeling of students as *gifted* or *not gifted*.

The wider the lens used to understand the gifted population, the more likely we will be able to set into motion strategies to better meet the needs of gifted students, especially those that may simultaneously experience other forms of exceptionality in addition to high levels of potential.

Baum and Olenchak shed light on what they coin the “alphabet syndrome,” in which kids are given strings of acronym labels (such as ADHD, GT, LD) that do little to help educators understand the needs of students. They suggest that we may need to assess the match between the label and the exhibited behaviors to diagnose whether the label provides a meaningful explanation of the condition.

Next, Nielsen discusses findings from her work with the Twice-Exceptional Child Projects in which students with learning disabilities (LDs) were also identified as gifted. Besides describing the nature of the twice-exceptional child, she outlines procedures

that will help identify the strengths of certain students with LDs that will include them in the identified gifted population as well.

As we explore different types of asynchronous behavior, Reis and McCoach ask these questions: Why do so many talented students fail to realize their potential? What are the conditions and characteristics of students that lead to underachievement by performance not consistent with their abilities? They outline the characteristics of giftedness, define underachievement, describe the causes of underachievement, and conclude with suggestions for recognizing underachievement in gifted populations.

Hébert reminds us that by recognizing young people's interests and providing support mechanisms such as mentors, enrichment programs, or counseling, students from less underprivileged backgrounds can thrive and excel. He shares three case studies to illustrate how schools, specifically teachers and other adults, can provide the necessary support to help gifted students realize their potential despite their impoverished environments.

Baldwin addresses the issues of cultural diversity and how we can create a model of identification that allows diverse populations to be included in gifted programs. She addresses identification and programming options that are appropriate for diverse students who do not fall in the mainstream middle-class population.

The message is clear. There is no one image of the gifted child and we need to acknowledge that the gifted may be part of other populations as well, be it ADHD, LD, impoverished, underachiever, bilingual, or ethnically diverse. We hope that this issue provides a large lens through which to look at the gifted population.