

FAST FORWARD: TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS AND THE FUTURE OF GIFTED EDUCATION

REFLECTIONS FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC CONFERENCE ON GIFTEDNESS

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In February, I had the pleasure of attending the Asia-Pacific Conference on Giftedness (APCG) 2026, held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. This bi-annual conference brought together leading scholars and practitioners from around the world. This year's theme, "Fast Forward: Vision 2050 for Gifted Education", challenged presenters and conference attendees to think about areas of focus for our field as we look toward the next half century. Across keynote sessions, symposia, and practitioner presentations, presenters highlighted how the field is evolving to better understand and support the diverse profiles of gifted learners. A central message throughout the conference was that the future of gifted education must move beyond narrow identification models toward comprehensive whole-learner talent development systems that recognize multiple pathways to excellence.

Educational psychologist Albert Ziegler emphasized the importance of talent ecosystems - coordinated networks of schools, mentors, and institutions that cultivate gifted potential over time. Rather than focusing solely on early identification, Ziegler argued for sustained developmental opportunities that allow talent to emerge and evolve across a learner's educational journey. Similarly, Heidrun Stoeger from the University of Regensburg, highlighted the role of motivation, mentorship, and structured opportunities for practice in nurturing high-level expertise. Her work underscored the importance of learning

environments intentionally designed to support persistence, creativity, and collaboration among advanced learners.

Equity also emerged as a major theme of the conference. Lucie Cerna discussed international policy trends emphasizing the need to expand access to advanced learning opportunities for students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Similarly, across sessions speakers noted that inclusive gifted education requires culturally responsive identification practices, flexible programming, and strong partnerships among schools, families, and communities.

What proved very inspiring to me personally was the prominence of discussions around talent development, particularly for students who are neurodiverse. I had the pleasure of serving on a panel of researchers and educators leading a symposium dedicated to twice exceptionality. In our discussion, we explored the complexities that exist within the 2e profile that often leads to them remaining invisible in schools because their strengths and challenges often mask one another. When educators focus primarily on deficits, students' talents go unrecognized; when only strengths are acknowledged, their diverse learning needs may be overlooked. During the symposium, we highlighted several key insights for the field:

- Strength-based identification practices are essential for recognizing students whose gifts may not appear through traditional measures of achievement.
- Integrated support systems that nurture both strengths and challenges are more effective than approaches focused solely on remediation.
- Educator preparation and awareness remain critical, as many teachers receive limited training in recognizing complex learner profiles.

These discussions reinforced a growing consensus that twice-exceptional learners require educational environments that value both talent development and individualized support.

Looking toward the future, many presenters emphasized that gifted education must also prepare learners to address complex global challenges. Interdisciplinary thinking, creativity, and problem-solving were repeatedly highlighted as essential capacities for the



next generation of innovators and leaders. Taken together, the conversations at APCG 2026 reflected a field that is increasingly focused on inclusive talent development; one that recognizes the many ways giftedness can manifest across cultures, contexts, and learner profiles. For educators and researchers, the message was clear: supporting gifted learners requires moving beyond static definitions of ability and toward dynamic systems that cultivate potential over time. Within this broader vision, recognizing and nurturing twice-exceptional learners remains a critical step in ensuring that no form of talent goes unseen.