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Bruce M. Shore

Taisir Subhi Yamin

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Interview (2):

Bruce M. Shore

Taisir Subhi Yamin

The International Centre for Innovation in Education (ICIE)

After two years as a secondary-school mathematics teacher, Bruce M. Shore joined the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, in January 1971. He played a guiding role in creating three graduate programs: the MEd and PhD in Educational Psychology and the PhD in School/Applied Child Psychology. He was Chair for nine years, President of the McGill Association of University Teachers, and McGill's Dean of Students for five years. For 21 years he was also in the instructional improvement unit, now called Teaching and Learning Services. He is a licensed teacher and psychologist in Quebec. Following 39 years on faculty, in 2010 he became Professor Emeritus of Educational Psychology and he remains active in publishing, as Co-Advisor to the Golden Key International Honour Society Chapter at McGill, and as a professional psychology accreditation site visitor and site-visit chair for the American and Canadian Psychological Associations.



Taisir Subhi Yamin (TSY):

What motivated you to enter the field of gifted and talented education?

Bruce M. Shore (BMS):

Many threads came together. I did not learn about the labels or the field until I was an undergraduate. I was very lucky in my youth and adolescence to have mentors who, through their own work, understood high potential and high performance. One was my piano teacher who took pride in students who did not just come close to his ability, but he claimed went beyond. I was not one of that group! . . . but the pedagogical part of it stuck. Our students can exceed our own accomplishments. The other, whom I met as a teenager, but he later became my master's thesis advisor, had sold his family's shoe factory, went to London to do his PhD with Philip E. Vernon on sex differences and the factorial nature of measured intelligence, then encouraged me to follow a similar path by which time Vernon had moved to Canada. Mentors matter.

Another thread was discovering the literatures on giftedness and optimal performance while preparing several undergraduate term papers. These included such topics as environmental and hereditary influences on measured abilities as revealed in studies of twins raised apart and another on optimal matching of machine controls with human factors including perception, reaction to emergency signals, and comfort for extended periods of operation. These exercises revealed several relevant books on gifted children, *Gifted Child Quarterly*, and Terman's longitudinal studies, among others.

Between my MA and PhD, I taught secondary school mathematics for two years. One of my former elementary school teachers, indeed the one who strongly urged my parents to let me skip a grade so she could quickly get me out of the school which then ended in my current grade, was then the head of mathematics at the secondary school. Classes for the autumn were created each June with a card system sorted into mailbox slots. She asked if I would help her work on the schedule for the first year of secondary school that I would be teaching. I agreed but asked if I could create a group of pupils with the most outstanding mathematics performance based on teachers' recommendations. She agreed if I also sorted out the most struggling class for myself. Settled. That experience, doing the required curriculum in one day a week and spending the other four days exploring students' interests in the larger world of mathematics was the third thread.

TSY

When did you start working in this field?

BMS:

I was eased in, so an exact date is hard to pin down. If it were at the time of the undergraduate term papers, 1963 is a good number. I started as an academic at McGill in January 1971. Any date in between would also be acceptable.

TSY:

What kind of major challenges did you face?

BMS:

I am not sure there were major local challenges to my engagement in gifted education and the study of giftedness. For example, my department Chair in 1974 got a notice of the 1975 First World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children organized by Henry Collis in London. My Chair also found some funding for me to attend and my affiliation has continued without interruption with the World Council. I was also able to get research funding over the years, although rarely on giftedness itself. I had parallel interests in instruction in higher education

(where one finds many gifted learners) and in what came to be called inquiry-based learning, a learning regime in which gifted learners especially thrive. Most of my research funding was tied to these latter topics, reinforcing my commitment to gifted education requiring strong pedagogical and political connections to general education.



Canada does not have a federal ministry of education, although some funding is provided with few strings attached to the provinces and territories for higher and some vocational education. As a result, commitment to gifted education as such varies in form and amount across the country. It is very difficult to measure impact. This was a substantial external challenge. At the same time, the quality and quantity of public financial support for general education from preschool to postgraduate is good if not perfect, and there have consistently been pockets of programming for gifted learners, specialized schools especially in the arts, and support for innovative activities and curricula. In most universities, however, if a professor wishes to work in the areas of giftedness and gifted education, this interest needs to be supported by the ability to contribute more broadly to the educational mission.

TSY:

How did you become involved internationally?

BMS:

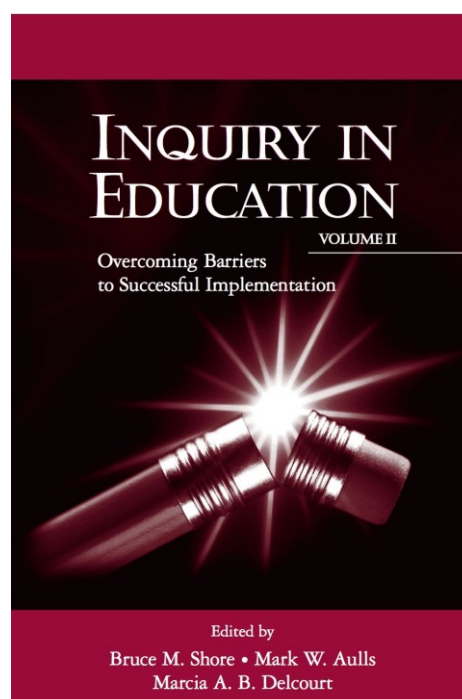
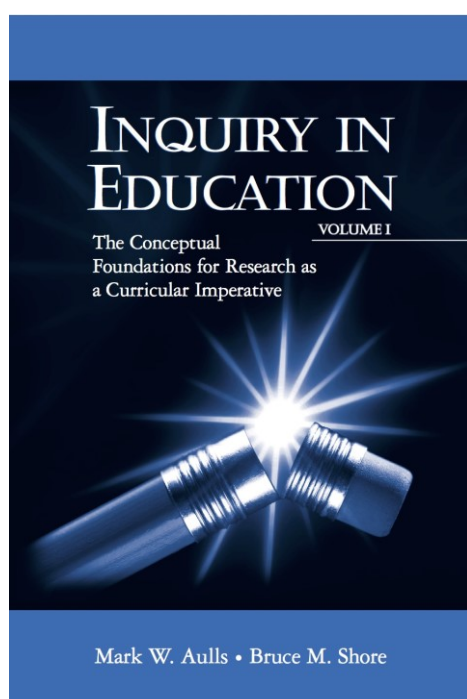
At last, a question with a direct initial answer! I attended the 1975 World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children in London, met many fascinating people, and attended the founding meeting of the World Council on Gifted and Talented Children during the 1977 World Conference. At the 1979 Jerusalem Word Conference, I presented a successful bid to host the 1981 World Conference in Montreal. For many years, I also belonged to the European Council for High Ability, and I served as Secretary of the World Council for several years. Until 1975 my publications—the other path to international involvement—were on improving teaching and learning in higher education, which I regarded as a highly complementary field. After 1975 I also started to publish on giftedness.

TSY:

What are your most significant accomplishments and contributions?

BMS:

That is a tougher question. I am not the author of a grand theory, model, or handbook on giftedness or gifted education. I think I filled gaps and kept plugging away at some key points. First, I have worked with some wonderful people to focus attention on evidence-based practices that are consistent with more general approaches such as inquiry. A corollary of that is to focus on context or situation. Instruction matters. There is so much emphasis on IQ and identification of individual ability, but a need exists to foster the qualities of the classroom and other learning situations that bring out the best a learner can accomplish. I especially subscribed on the cognitive side to the idea that giftedness is emerging or developing expertise, and many of my publications provided evidence of how that was the case. In more recent decades, I have also worked with my students to bring social and academic issues into joint focus. Topics that we have addressed included how gifted learners' friendships are in some ways different, that gifted learners are not by nature loners but they are indeed fussy about with whom they work and under what conditions, expectations, and preferences when doing group work—a consistent feature of collaborative learning environments.



TSY:

Will you please shed light on your contributions relating to the measurement of potential abilities and assessment?

BMS:

There is just one, and it has not rocked too many boats! Measurement of potential or performance has not been my major focus. I have been more attentive to assessing inquiry outcomes. However, we did a very simple identification study that compared two groups of summer-school students attending two campuses of a gifted-education program we began with the 1981 World Conference. One campus (in partnership with a school district, so they paid the piper) required high performance and a high IQ to attend. The other campus, our own regular program, was entirely based on self or family choice to enrol. We even accepted siblings without question about test results, classroom performance, etc. A key limitation was that there was a tuition fee, so we cannot judge if there was an impact on accessibility. We gave all the students a

large battery of achievement and ability tests. There were no differences between the groups; the open-door campus had temptingly higher scores on several ability measures, but the differences were small and not statistically significant. I remain sceptical about the ubiquity and exclusiveness of IQ or similar scores to either define giftedness or serve as a gatekeeper for services, especially when they close rather than open doors.

Of course, open doors to gifted services in general would be highly disruptive administratively, which is partly why I hope to see fewer barriers between what gifted education seeks to accomplish and the goals of high-quality general education.

TSY:

What knowledge would you wish researchers in this field to have?

BMS:

My experience is that researchers in the field are quite well informed. However, I have expressed concern in the past that I am unsure of the value of doctoral degrees (the usual admission ticket to a research career) that are exclusively in gifted education. The question correctly identifies this as a “field” of application. Being able to ask good research questions and making a cumulative contribution generally requires building knowledge by testing theory from the perspective of a discipline. Disciplines evolve, but having one, any one or more, seems to me essential for researchers in the field. I am also concerned that the “field” continues to be seen as separate from high quality general education. So I would answer, further, that I would wish researchers in gifted education had clear vision of the interconnections between gifted education and another area or more in which society is highly invested. I am not arguing that they (we!) do not have this vision, just emphasizing that it is very important scientifically and politically. Gifted education has much to learn from and to contribute to education in general.

TSY:

Can you please explain some of the strengths and limits of “Gifted Education?”

BMS:

I think I have hinted at these, so I’ll limit my reply to one example of each. A key strength is that there is considerable attention to what is common versus what is uncommon in human potential and performance. Gifted education is well placed to celebrate the amazing things some young learners can accomplish and share the experience, if not the same outcome, with excellent instruction. At the same time, gifted education can benefit (and does often) from the most important advances in education. Gifted education can help support general education from drifting back into old pedagogies such as excessive drill-and-practice that are not associated with the best of education either individually or societally. The main weakness is the flip side of the coin: Being or being perceived as separate, aloof, in competition for resources or even students.

TSY:

You have been working with a number of scholars. Can you tell us some memories about these people?

BMS:

In a half century, there are too many to list here, and I apologize to anyone omitted. All are dear to me, and several have become personal friends as well as scholar-colleagues. In the area of inquiry, instructional psychology, and social constructivism, Mark Aulls has been a pillar for me. He is not well known in the “gifted” arena, but our work together spills over readily.

Better known in the field are several people with whom friendships dominated over direct collaboration, but there were shared moments in presentations and governance at the World Council, National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC-USA) and The Association for the

Gifted. These included the late Harry Passow who was key to the creation of the first Secretariat for the World Council at Teachers' College, Columbia University; his friend and colleague Abe Tannenbaum who especially recognized the close connection between cognitive abilities and social development in adolescence; and John Feldhusen at Purdue--mentor to so many active leaders in gifted education, who as NAGC President changed the rules so someone from outside the USA (specifically me) could join the Board, and he created speaking opportunities to share our research. He and I also shared combined appointments in educational psychology with a personal interest in giftedness and gifted education, and in the instructional-improvement units of our respective universities. Virgil Ward, a serious iconoclast who popularized the term "differentiation" also had the insight to create a working group dedicated to knowledge production and utilization in giftedness and gifted education. I met Dorothy Sisk on my first sabbatical leave when my wife and I visited as many key people as we could in North America. Very gracious and generous and deeply insightful, we have remained in contact. Sally Reis and Joe Renzulli, happily both still leaders emeriti in gifted education, became friends more than collaborators partly because we share deep commitments to the same kinds of instructional approaches that make learning stick.

One of my most active collaborators in the field has been Ann Robinson. She has a razor-sharp intellect, a wonderful sense of humor, and unmatched leadership skills in the organizational side of the field. I heard her give a presentation very early in her career and literally followed her across the campus to ask her to join the team that included Virgil Ward and Tom Hébert that created the 1991 volume, *Recommended Practices in Gifted Education*. We scoured the literature to evaluate what degree of research support there was for 101 widely advocated educational activities. I also first met June Maker when she was a young academic. She came to Montreal as a demonstration teacher in our summer program. Although her original curriculum model was designed for gifted education, it was clearly a brilliant general contribution, and her work has now branched out even further. Marcia Delcourt worked at McGill for several years before she returned to the USA. She is a remarkable institutional entrepreneur, outstanding pedagogue, and expert on inquiry-based learning, and provides inspiration and a solid knowledge foundation for school-based learners in gifted education and beyond. Both are also valued friends.

I supervised over a hundred graduate theses, and was delighted with all my students. Most have produced just one or a few joint publications, and these were a match in quality with those by students and graduates who have chosen to be more prolific. Three are frequent current and recent collaborators. Camelia Birlean's career has taken her in the direction of school-district pedagogical consultant. She has a remarkable grasp of the concept of pedagogical-content knowledge, the blending of knowledge of one's subject matter and how that translates into effective teaching and the evaluation of learners' creative work. Tanya Chichekian is a professor of higher education. Her research is focused more on inquiry-based teaching and learning in higher education, but I have already indicated that there are close parallels to gifted education. Cheryl Walker is a school psychologist with an understanding beyond that of most in her profession of how inquiry works in a classroom, especially the diversification of roles for both teachers and learners, and when and how classroom practices succeed or break down. With apologies to those not mentioned—these are all such valued connections.

TSY:

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

BMS:

I officially retired in 2010. My last graduate students finished in 2016. I am not very good at retirement, but slowly getting better. The problem with enjoying one's work is that is both a vocation and an avocation. I have a couple of dozen papers waiting to be written up based on data not yet reported, plus a small number of book projects. Invitations still arrive

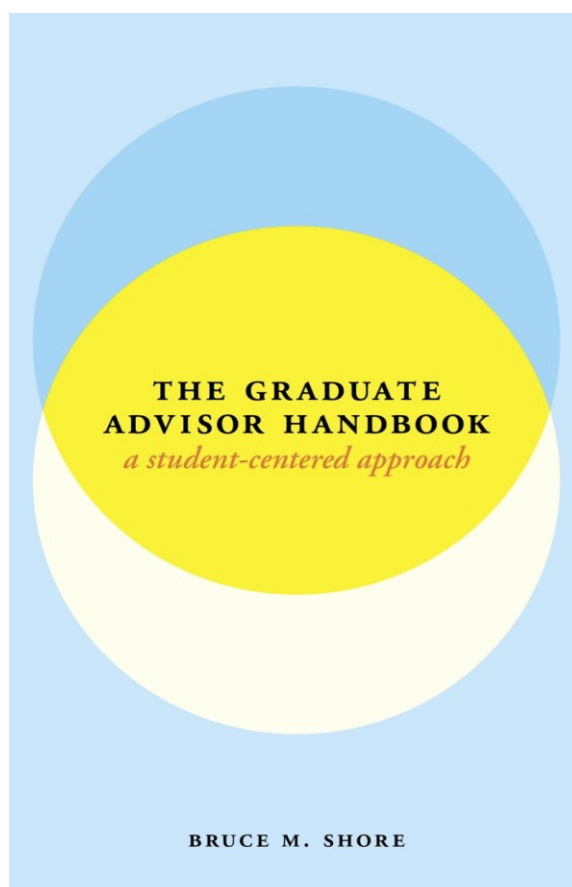
occasionally to submit chapters, and I do occasional consulting with school districts and schools. I remain the Advisor to the McGill chapter of the Golden Key International Honour Society to which the “top” 15% of university students may accept the membership invitation (again combining my academic interests), and I am active in retiree activities at McGill. I also chair one or two accreditation site visits each year for professional psychology programs in Canada and the USA. I try to spend several hours a week writing, but I am also “severely” invested in our grandchildren and two other hobbies, classical piano (that teacher did have an impact!) and model trains. My wife and I split our time between our homes in Montreal and Tucson, travel when and where COVID conditions allow, and stay healthy!

Previous Personal Overviews

- Henshon, S. E. (2010). A journey toward excellence: An interview with Bruce M. Shore. *Roeper Review*, 32(2), 74-77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783191003587850>
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Selected Representative Publications

Books



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- Clark, C., & Shore, B. M. (2004). *Educating students with high ability* (rev. ed.). UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001383/138328e.pdf> (The revision of Chapter 4 was coauthored by J. A. Irving.)
- Robinson, A., Shore, B. M., & Enersen, D. L. (2006). *Best practices in gifted education: An evidence-based guide*. Prufrock Press (now Routledge) and the National Association for Gifted Children, Washington, DC.
- Shore, B. M. (2014). *The graduate advisor handbook: A student-centered approach*. The University of Chicago Press (in the series *Chicago Guides to Academic Life*). From: <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226011783.001.0001>
- Shore, B. M., Aulls, M. W., & Delcourt, M. A. B. (Eds.). (2008). *Inquiry in education* (Vol. II): *Overcoming barriers to successful implementation*. Erlbaum (now Routledge). ISBN-13:978- 0- 8058- 2744- 6 (softcover, also available hardbound).
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- Chichekian, T., & Shore, B. M. (2014). The International Baccalaureate: Contributing to the use of inquiry in higher education teaching and learning. In J. M. Carfora & P. Blessinger (Eds.), *Inquiry-based learning for faculty and institutional development: A conceptual and practical resource for educators* (Vol. 1 in the series, *Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning*, series editor P. Blessinger) (pp. 73-97). Emerald. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2055-364120140000001006>
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Education Summary

- BSc, Teaching Diploma, MA (Education), McGill University.
- PhD (Educational Psychology), The University of Calgary.
- Licensed Teacher and Psychologist in Quebec.

Career Highlights

- Secondary-School Mathematics Teacher, Laval, Quebec, Canada.
- Professor of Educational Psychology Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
- Chair of the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology.
- President of the McGill Association of University Teachers.
- Dean of Students, McGill University.
- Currently--Professor Emeritus of Educational Psychology, McGill University.

Academic Awards

- International Award for Research, World Council for Gifted and Talented Children.
- Distinguished Scholar Award, National Association for Gifted Children (USA).
- American Mensa Education & Research Foundation and Mensa International Awards for Excellence for Research on Human Intelligence and Intellectual Giftedness (6 awards, all jointly with then-current or past students).
- Fellow of the American Educational Research Association.
- Canadian Committee for Graduate Students in Education Mentorship Award.
- McGill University Principal's Prize for Excellence in Teaching, Full Professor Category.
- McGill University David Thomson Award for Excellence in Graduate Supervision and Teaching.
- McGill University Faculty of Education Distinguished Teaching Award.
- Visiting Fellow, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge, and Visiting Scholar, Department of Education and Institute of Education, Cambridge, England.

Address

Professor Bruce M. Shore

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology
McGill University; 3700 McTavish (Room 614)
Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 1Y2

e-Mail: bruce.m.shore@mcgill.ca