

Identifying and Serving Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Gifted Students

Introduction

As the nation becomes more and more diverse, gifted education programs should reflect changing U.S. demographics. Equitably identified gifted students represent cultural and linguistic diversity as well as a wide range of socioeconomic groups and geographic areas, yet these populations are too often overlooked. Reversing the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students (CLD) in gifted education will require that educators have a thorough understanding of the reasons that CLD students have traditionally been excluded from participation in gifted programs.

Position Statement

Identifying and serving CLD students enriches the fabric of gifted education and cultivates what is still an untapped national resource. In order to promote equitable access and school success for CLD students, schools and supportive organizations need to be strategic, purposeful, and committed to altering common identification and programming practices. Current policies, procedures, and practices need to be thoroughly examined and defensible identification protocols developed and implemented. Effective teaching and learning models and school support services should also be intentionally designed to address the specific needs of CLD students.

Pertinent Issues

In order to meet the needs of CLD students, a change in how educators view these students must occur. A multi-dimensional paradigm shift from a deficit to a strength perspective is proposed to ensure the unique abilities of these students are recognized.

Dimension #1- Culturally Sensitive Identification Protocols

Scholars in the field of gifted education have long recognized challenges related to creating equitable identification procedures for CLD gifted students¹. Scholarly work delineating cultural differences and the impact of poverty on the manifestation of talent offers potentially useful information for consideration in developing identification protocols for CLD students².

Use of multiple criteria in assessment is essential for illuminating student strengths and developing appropriate instruction. Research has demonstrated that a combination of formal,

informal and dynamic assessments offers an inclusionary, rather than exclusionary, protocol for identification of children who are gifted³. Best practice recommends the use of checklists, incorporating multiple criteria, to be completed by teachers trained to recognize how giftedness is manifested in CLD learners; checklists developed for parents and family; valid and reliable assessments instruments; student interviews; and evaluation of work samples⁴.

Dimension #2- Early and Continuous Access to Advanced Curriculum

Best practices for meeting the needs of CLD gifted students should be an integration of strategies and models found most effective in three fields: gifted education, multicultural/diversity education, and bilingual education. High-quality, advanced curriculum designed for CLD students needs to continue to be created and evaluated. Providing students, who might otherwise be overlooked, an opportunity to demonstrate that they can respond to advanced curriculum is also recommended prior to the formal identification process.

Equitable programming for secondary CLD gifted learners includes access to Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate programs, and dual enrollment, among others. Such options can be provided only in environments free from single-criteria admissions, discriminatory counseling, and narrow recruitment.

Dimension #3- Essential Supports for CLD Gifted Students

Attending to social and emotional development is also critical to the success of CLD populations. These students are often less likely to remain in gifted programs without psychological support and appropriate programming.

Program supports may come in various forms. The establishment of cohort groups of students with shared cultural background has been found to have positive impact on retention, promoting a sense of belonging and support. Instituting gender- and culture-specific mentoring programs potentially enhances self-esteem and provides strong role models. School counselors may also facilitate small-group sessions to address concerns of CLD students.

Dimension #4- Effective Home, Community, and School Connections

Research linking the success of CLD gifted learners to positive family relationships and home environment provides examples of students excelling in school despite economic and social barriers⁵. Building relationships among home, school, and communities of CLD students requires active support for, and involvement of families in gifted education programs.

A positive view of home contexts can also help to improve home-school relationships. Advocacy training led by CLD parents, teachers, and other school personnel with dual expertise in diversity education and gifted education can lead to family-school-community support groups.

Recommendations and Best Practices

Develop culturally sensitive identification protocols

- NAGC recommends that states and school districts critically examine policies and practices related to identification to determine where and how diverse students are excluded from gifted programs.
- To capture a holistic profile of all students, multiple criteria should be the norm. Qualitative and quantitative information gathered from families, teachers, and students should be part of the evaluative process.
- All instruments used for screening and identification (e.g., checklists, referral forms, assessments) should be valid, reliable, and culturally and linguistically sensitive.

Ensure early and continuous access to high- end curriculum

- Teachers should provide CLD students with opportunities to be inspired and to demonstrate their giftedness. These opportunities should be provided early and continuously to ensure student success in gifted programs.
- Institutions of Higher Education and school districts should utilize the *National Gifted Education Standards for PreK-12 Professional Development* and *Using the Gifted Education Standards for University Teacher Preparation Programs* as guides for developing coursework and opportunities for professional development.

Provide Essential Supports for CLD gifted students

- Schools should create support programs to help gifted students from diverse backgrounds develop strong academic identities, learn coping strategies for dealing with negative peer pressure and discriminatory practices, and gain resiliency for responding to challenging life circumstances. Supportive programs should include opportunities to have relationships with adults and college students from varied cultural groups across multiple domains.

Establish Effective Home, School and Community connections

- School leadership and personnel should be proactive in building trusting, reciprocal relationships with diverse families and communities.
- School personnel should enlist the support of local businesses and civic and faith-based organizations as partners in identifying and educating CLD gifted children and youth.
- Schools are also encouraged to present information to faculty, staff, families and the community about cultural influences on giftedness and how giftedness may be manifested.
- CLD parent support groups can be formed to help families of CLD students bond with each other and help schools enrich curriculum with information about unique cultural values.

Focus Research on Equity Issues

- University, school district, private, and federal entities working in partnership should seek funding for research and demonstration projects related to equity issues.
- Where best practices are currently in place, funding should be secured to ensure continuation of programming with consideration toward replicating such programs.

Summary

As a matter of urgency, it is incumbent upon the field of gifted education to end with expediency the longstanding concern regarding the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted programs. Policies, procedures, and practices require continued examination and defensible identification protocols need to be developed and implemented. Effective teaching and learning models, and school support services designed to address the specific needs of CLD students also need intentional consideration. Where best practices are currently in place, funding is needed to replicate and ensure successful continuation. Where under-representation persists, efforts must be continued to conceptualize, formalize, and implement effective strategies on behalf of CLD students. These students deserve nothing less.

Citations

¹ Boothe, D. & Stanley, J. C. (Eds.) (2004). *In the eyes of the beholder: Critical issues for diversity in gifted education*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

This book looks at education of the gifted through the lens of several different cultures. It gives one a broader perception of how giftedness can be seen in different cultures although each is different. A section on the beliefs of and ideas of the core education community will stimulate much thought and provoke great discussion of the pros and cons of education for the gifted and the selection and development processes used with these students.

² Baldwin, A.Y. (2004). *Culturally diverse and underserved populations of gifted students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

This book, part of the Essential Readings in Gifted Education series, contains twelve seminal articles from *Gifted Child Quarterly*. Each article addresses critical issues related to culturally and linguistically diverse gifted learners and sheds light on their unique needs as well as offer strategies for successful programming.

³ Ford, D.Y. (2010). *Reversing Underachievement in Gifted Black Students*, 2nd Ed. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

This second edition of Ford's groundbreaking work addresses the two 'thorny issues' continuing to exist in education: underrepresentation of black students in gifted programs and underachievement of black students even when identified as gifted. This edition provides updated information on key social, familial, educational, and psychological factors that contribute to underachievement and underrepresentation. Underachievement and underrepresentation are placed squarely within the larger context of the achievement gap and deficit thinking.

⁴ Briggs, C. J., Reis, S. M., & Sullivan, E. E. (2008). A national view of promising programs and practices for culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse gifted and talented students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 52(2), pp.131-145.

This article shares the results from a qualitative study investigating methods to increase successful participation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in gifted programs across the nation. Five categories are identified as contributors to successful identification and participation of CLD students in gifted programs. These categories are modified identification procedures, program support systems, curricular/instructional designs, building parent/home connections, and using program evaluation to highlight CLD students' success.

⁵ Castellano, J.A. & Frazier, A.D. (2010). *Special populations in gifted education: Understanding our most able students from diverse backgrounds*. Waco, TX: National Association for Gifted Children/Prufrock Press.

This book is divided into three sections. The first section is dedicated to specific subgroups of students. Contributing authors dispute conventional understanding of and champion the experience of gifted students who represent the diversity that exists in schools. The second section specifically advocates for English language learners, students who represent a unique challenge to our schools and gifted education in general. The final section addresses related issues and topics that must be considered when guiding special populations of gifted students.

Other Recommended Readings

Angelelli, C., Enright, K., & Valdés, G. (2002). *Developing the talents and abilities of linguistically gifted bilingual students: Guidelines for developing curriculum at the high school level (RM02156)*. Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.

This monograph, written for school personnel working with bilingual students, provides suggestions for creating and implementing a high school curriculum focusing on interpretation and translation. The curriculum builds on bilingual immigrant students' linguistic strengths and provides specific strategies and lesson plans for nurturing their talents.

Baldwin, A.Y. & Vialle, W. (Eds.) (1999). *The many faces of giftedness: Lifting the masks*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press.

This text explores the many ways that giftedness has historically been overlooked because of an individual's culture, handicap, or language differences. This unique book looks at the similarities in issues related to gifted education from an international perspective. Views from authors from the United States, Australia and Ukraine provide a provocative look at giftedness across cultural groups.

Bianco, M. (2010) Strength-Based RTI: Conceptualizing a multi-tiered system for developing gifted potential, *Theory into Practice*, 49 (4), pp. 323 – 330.

This article explores a strength-based Response to Intervention (RTI) model for developing and identifying gifted potential. Bianco examines RTI's potential to meet the unique learning needs of gifted and talented students and discusses challenges teachers might face.

Coleman, M. R. & Coltrane Shah, S. (2004). *Personnel Preparation: The Early Recognition and Cultivation of Potential, Using Science Talents and Abilities to Recognize Students*. Washington, DC: Council of Exceptional Children.

This monograph reports the findings of a Javits grant research and demonstration program designed to recognize talent potential in underrepresented populations and enhance their academic programming through a literacy-based science program. Project U-STARs PLUS has been adopted in five states across the country and successfully improved gifted services for early elementary students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Davis, J.L. (2010). *Bright, Talented, & Black: A Guide for Families of African American gifted learners*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.

This empowering guidebook shares research based best practices and 'insider tips' with families to assist them with understanding the history and language of the field of gifted education,

accessing services and guiding their gifted children to reach their full potential. Special features include; an advocate's vocabulary (empowering parents to 'walk the talk' of gifted education); success strategies employed by families of successful African American gifted students; and a discussion of challenges experienced by all gifted children, with specific attention to the challenges of being black and gifted in our nation's schools and communities today.

Ford, D.Y., Grantham, T. C., & Whiting, G. W. (2008). Culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education: Recruitment and retention issues. *Exceptional Children*, 74, 289-306.

In this article, the authors examine multiple factors that hinder the recruitment and retention of diverse students in gifted education. After a thorough review of the literature and discussion focusing on definitions, theories, referral issues, and deficit thinking, the authors offer recommendations for improving the representation of diverse students in gifted programs.

Gallagher, R.M. (2002). A parent-family involvement model to serve gifted Hispanic English-language learners in urban public school settings. In Castellano, J.A. and Diaz, E.I. (Eds), *Reaching New Horizons* (250-264). Boston: Allyn and Bacon

In this chapter, Gallagher presents an overview of a comprehensive parent-involvement model. The model was implemented as a orientation summer program in a gifted magnet center serving a large Hispanic population in a large urban school district.

Lee, S., Olszewskil-Kubilius, P., & Peternal, G. (2010). The efficacy of academic acceleration for gifted minority students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 54(3), pp. 189-208.

This article reports findings of an in-depth qualitative investigation looking at the perceptions and experiences of academically talented minority students and their teachers in an accelerative program in mathematics. The goal of the accelerated program was designed to help elementary to middle school gifted minority students prepare for advanced coursework in high school. The results indicate support for acceleration of minority students with mathematical talent and identified the effects of solid preparation for academic acceleration through preparatory educational programming.

Tomlinson, C., Ford, D.Y., Reis, S., Briggs, C.J., & Strickland, C. (2004). *In search of a dream: Designing schools and classrooms that work for high potential students from diverse cultural backgrounds*. Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children.

This book provides a framework for designing programs and curricular choices to support multicultural inclusiveness. Case studies showcase programs that respond to diverse student populations. Also included are chapters on gifted and general education programs for culturally diverse learners with extensive resources for school administrators, teachers, and parents.

VanTassel-Baska, J. & Stambaugh, T. (2007). *Overlooked Gems: A National Perspective on Low-Income Promising Learners*. Conference proceedings from the National Leadership Conference on Low-Income Promising Learners. Washington, D.C. : The National Association for Gifted Children and the Center for Gifted Education, College of William and Mary.

This monograph contains the 2007 conference proceedings shared by leading experts in the field of gifted education, multicultural education and related fields whose primary work has focused on obtaining equity and excellence in education for low income learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. The conference convened researchers and practitioners who work directly with the targeted students. The conference was attended by over 80 educators representing 30 states.

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