

Overcoming Underrepresentation in Gifted Programs, Part I: Attitude and Access

Overcoming Underrepresentation in Gifted Programs Among Culturally, Linguistically, Ethnically Diverse, and Diverse Social and Economic Gifted Learners: A Parent and School Engagement Perspective, Part I

By Ken Dickson

Editor's Note: This is the first of a two-part series by guest Talking Circles columnist Ken Dickson on how parents and schools can work to overcome underrepresentation of specific populations in gifted programs. This month's column focuses on the roles of attitude and access.

Underrepresentation among culturally, linguistically, ethnically diverse (CLED) learners and learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds in gifted programs and services continue. Improvements have occurred, but much work remains. For at least four decades, gifted education (*the field*, herein) has engaged in formal discourse concerning these learners. Multiple perspectives have been offered. For this article, the perspectives will focus on four areas – *attitude, access, assessment and accommodations*. The areas represent outcomes of research from several stakeholders regarding diverse learners and gifted programs and particularly Dr. Mary Fraiser. Dr. Fraiser, an African-American scholar and past president of the National Association for Gifted Children, dedicated her life to areas regarding underrepresented populations of learners. In that regard, this information is based on her contributions.



Attitude – Attitude involves a mental position, feeling or emotion towards CLED and learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds.

What should be included in engagement between school and its CLED parents, and parents from diverse social and economic backgrounds regarding mental positions, feelings and emotions?

Parents and schools should engage in parent awareness and personnel professional development. The outcomes of such engagement should enhance mental positions, feelings and emotions toward CLED and groups from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Specific topics should focus on:

- Deficit thinking and teaching. Deficit thinking involves educators interpreting learners' differences as deficits, dysfunctions or disadvantaged traits. Such interpretations focus primarily on learners' differences and deficits, while positive traits become masked and secondary.
- Diverse learner-family-teacher relationships.
- Culturally relevant/congruent instruction practices.
- Equitable educational access, opportunities and support.
- Student exceptionalities that impact giftedness.
- Courageous, open, transparent conversations about differences.
- Parent/caregiver dynamics.

Access – Access involves ways in which CLED learners and learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds are considered for gifted program placement.

What should be included in engagement between CLED parents, and parents from diverse social and economic backgrounds regarding placement considerations?

Parents and schools should engage in identification awareness and implementation activities that focus on clear systematic and ongoing information that involve:

- National, state and local identification/access concepts, regulations, policies, practices, process and procedures designed to foster equity in GT programming and services.
- Environments and instructional activities that encourage the expression of diverse characteristics and behaviors associated with giftedness.
- Diverse characteristics and behaviors associated with giftedness.
- The use of multiple assessments that measure diverse abilities, talents and strengths.
- Assessments that provide qualitative and quantitative information from a variety of sources, including off-level testing that is nonbiased and equitable.
- Student exceptionalities.
- Using multiple assessments, including non-biased and equitable identification/access practices and locally developed norms or assessment tools.
- Information that explains the nature and purpose of your gifted program services in their native language.
- Strength-based teaching and learning.

A framework to guide such engagement is the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) 2010 Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards. The standards were influenced by a variety of stakeholders. The standards integrate principles and concepts from the initial program standards and the national NAGC and The Association for Gifted, a Division of the Council for Exceptional Children teacher preparation standards. Increased diversity and collaboration is the focus.

Read [Part II](#) of Mr. Dickson's article.

Ken Dickson has served in administration capacities for Gifted Education for over 25 years. He currently serves as Specialist for students with gifts/talents and learning disabilities for Baltimore County Public Schools in Towson, Maryland. His interests include applications of research and practices concerning academic and cultural diversity relationships. A special interest focuses on educational equity and interventions that support students' access, support, and opportunities for learning in exceptional educational learning environments. Ken serves as a member of the Council for Exceptional Children; the Board for The Association for Gifted of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Editorial Review Board for Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted. He is a past member of the NAGC Board of Directors and the Executive Board for the Division for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional Learners of CEC.