

Overcoming Underrepresentation in Gifted Programs, Part II: Assessment and Accommodation

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

By Ken Dickson

Editor's Note: This is the second 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 assessment and accommodation. Click [here](#) to read part one, which discusses the roles of attitude and access.



Assessment – Assessment includes the entire process of evaluating the presence and degree of giftedness in CLED learners and learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Assessment provides information about identification, learning and progress outcomes, and evaluation of programming for students with gifts and talents in all domains (NAGC 2010 Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards).

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

Schools implement student assessment practices related to access/identification process. Parent and school engagement should:

- Include activities that reflect and respect the culture (background, behaviors and experiences) of CLED learners and learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds.
- Include parent awareness and input opportunities to serve as alternatives to traditional objective tests such as intelligence or achievement measures.
- Use processes to factor out cultural bias associated with traditional assessments and use parent information. Generally, traditional assessments are biased regarding the backgrounds, behaviors and experiences associated with giftedness and CLED learners and learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds. The assessments assume that all students are similarly acculturated or assimilated to reflect majority culture norms. In that regard schools should:

- *Use multiple assessment processes and should not use the outcomes of traditional assessments as standalone indicators of giftedness.*
- *Establish comprehensive, systematic and ongoing practices that are nonbiased and equitable.*
- *Use of a variety of subjective and objective measures to assess students for GT program access, participation and retention.*

- *Include locally developed norms; disaggregate data to account for economic, race and class differences.*
- *Use equitable and nonbiased interventions to compensate for educational and community realities including human bias and misinformation about giftedness. This includes the realities associated with poor instruction and lack of access to high quality education that can contribute to poor scores on traditional assessments (Ford, Grantham, Whiting, Gilman, 2008).*
- *Consider the impact of culture on test scores (Ford, 2004; Ford & Frazier-Trotman, 2000; Helms, 1992; Miller-Jones, 1989; Sternberg, 2007).*
- *Understand how culturally loaded tests can lower culturally and linguistically diverse students' test scores (Fagan & Holland, 2002; Flanagan & Ortiz, 2001; Skiba et al., 2002).*
- *Be conscientious in seeking to interpret and use test scores sensibly, to explore various explanations for the differential test scores, and to consider alternative instruments and assessment practices (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999).*

From: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Gifted Education, Ford, Donna Y; Grantham, Tarek C; Whiting, Gilman W. April 2, 2008

Accommodations – Accommodations include program design and curricular experiences to support needs and interests of CLED learners and learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Included are adjustments and modifications to services, activities and practices (programming) to complement and maximize learner performance and to garner parent satisfaction and support.

What accommodations are evidenced at your school? Does your school:

- Communicate programming in a variety of ways? Communicate frequently across diverse languages and formats?
- Personalize and maintain communication with families?
- Make personal phone calls to parents?
- Provide written communication in parents' native languages?
- Provide interpreters when needed?
- Celebrate/share positive events (not just negative ones)?
- Have a citizens advisory committee that represents the diversity of the community? If it does, it should be comprised of:

- *by-laws that deliberately and explicitly speak to the cultural and linguistic differences in your community.*
- *meetings that occur every 4-6 weeks. It should include special topics that focus on diversity and academic relationships.*

- *elected and appointed citizens from diverse communities in leadership teams/roles and on sub-committees. To prevent disproportionate representation and election issues/challenges, the school should establish designated positions which only representatives from cultural/linguistic different (diverse) backgrounds can hold.*

Does your school:

- Respect language diversity?
- Consider schoolhouse language spoken among learners vs. language spoken at home and in the community?
- Include participation of CLED learners and learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds in Board meetings and similar public meetings?

During conferences, do school representatives:

- Show an interest in the family, as well as the program?
- Invite genuine two-way communication?

Adapted: Rose M. Matuszny, Devender R. Banda and Thalia J. Coleman; TEACHING EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN MAR/APR 2007

Curriculum and Instruction

Does your school:

- Select, adapt, and use a repertoire of instructional strategies and materials that differentiate for students with gifts and talents and that respond to diversity?
- Develop and use challenging, culturally responsive curriculum to engage all students with gifts and talents?
- Use curriculum for deep explorations of cultures, languages, and social issues related to diversity?

From: National Association for Gifted Children K-12 Program Standards, 2010.

Social Interactions

Does your school Enhance Social Interactions?

- Have an off-campus social event 3 weeks or so before school begins, to allow parents/family members and teachers to get to know each other?
- Have a potluck/picnic at a local park or have an indoor event such as a dance, auction or raffle with a theme that encourages collaboration and support?
- Have cook-off (team up parents/families and professionals) opportunities?
- Have arts/crafts (team up parents/families and professionals) events such as a cultural arts and crafts night where parents and professionals can connect?
- Have opportunities so parents can teach others how to create useful and/or fun items?

- Have picnic and games at a local theme park, county or state park?
- Have a talent show and dinner with a multicultural theme?
- Plan and carry out activities in CLED communities/facilities; not always at school?

At the End of the Year

Does your school:

- Meet with or call its CLED and social and economic diverse parents/families and use interpreters if needed?
- Discuss CLED and social and economic diverse families' experiences in working collaboratively with the school and other parents?
- Discuss what worked well and what did not work well?

Does your school ask CLED and social and economic diverse families:

- If anything could be changed, what could it be?
- How could the partnership be strengthened?
- To complete feedback surveys on relationships with them? Is the survey in the language of the families?
- To participate in end of year events in which a segment of the agenda focuses on diversity?
- To participate in developing a report to the Board of Education regarding the status of collaboration with the CLED and social and economic diverse community?

Adapted: Rose M. Matuszny, Devender R. Banda and Thalia J. Coleman; TEACHING EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN MAR/APR 2007

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.