Culturally Diverse Students Who Are Gifted

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Culturally diverse students are receiving much deserved attention by educators of the gifted. Historically, the field has been unable to answer all concerns about this "minority within the gifted minority"; however, research and census data indicate that diversity has become a priority in educational settings. Understanding the meaning of cultural diversity and accepting new paradigms for developing organizational and instructional strategies are important variables that lead to success in meeting the needs of this population. Research has shown that conceptual and attitudinal changes toward the recognition of hidden abilities often overlooked in culturally diverse groups have enriched successful programs for the gifted. Recommendations for the involvement of administrators, teachers, parents, and the community in the planning process for inclusion of culturally diverse students in programs for the gifted provide a roadmap for this complex process.

Within the last 3 decades, there has been an intense interest in the education of gifted students. Appropriate identification strategies, organizational plans for meeting these needs, and teaching and curriculum strategies have been in the forefront of debates about best practices. Within this mix of concerns has been the continuing dilemma of applying established criteria to those students who are culturally diverse. Throughout this period of time many (e.g., Baldwin, 1985; Bernal & Reyna, 1975; Frasier, 1989; Richert, 1985) have kept the concern for the culturally diverse gifted child before the educational decision-makers. Understanding the significant meaning of cultural diversity and accepting different paradigms regarding giftedness, appropriate identification, and program provisions for children from these diverse backgrounds have been the source of discontent in the attempt to provide clues of giftedness that can be found in all ethnic-cultural groups.

Much has been written on this topic and it is not the intent of this article to review again all of these concerns, but rather to give some practical suggestions for teachers and administrators who are and will be facing these continuing concerns in the future. It is important, however, to review some aspects of the past discussions of this domain to provide meaningful suggestions.

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UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL IDENTITY

Cultural diversity has been defined in many ways and an understanding of these definitions allows for the provision of appropriate programs for culturally diverse gifted students. Culture is "the essence of who we are and how we exist in the world (Hollins, 1996, p.18). It comes from experiences found in a particular environment. Further, Hall (as cited in Hollins, 1996) in his description of the function of culture said, "Culture is man's medium. This means personality, how people express themselves, and the way they think" (p. 18).

Another definition states, "In an attempt to understand differences, there have been many efforts to look at the effects of culture, societal attitudes, and language on the lack of inclusion of African Americans and other diverse groups in programs for the gifted" (Baldwin & Vialle, 1999, p. 5). Banks's (1989) explanation of the necessity to attend to the needs of gifted children of diverse backgrounds can be used to give a perspective of culture. He has suggested that the culture of the United States overlaps many cultures without diluting the role each plays in the development of the individual. He explained that:

a nation as culturally diverse as the United States consists of a common-overarching culture, as well as a series of microcultures. These microcultures share most of the core values of the nation-state, but these values are often mediated by the various microcultures and are interpreted differently within them. Afro-Americans and Hispanic Americans who have not experienced high levels of cultural assimilation into the mainstream culture are much more group-oriented than are mainstream Americans. These students experience problems in the highly individualistic learning environment of the school. (p. 10)

This explanation of culture also clarifies the relationship of ethnicity and culture. Ethnicity refers to a biological grouping, whereas the micro- and macroenvironment in which a particular ethnic group exists influences culture. Moreover, diverse students bring to the educational table traits, personalities, and experiences that do not always fit into the mold of traditional programs for the gifted. Kozol (1995), MacLeod (1995), and Ladson-Billings (1994) have expressed the urgency as well as the great possibilities present in recognizing the high quality of students from diverse backgrounds. In the late 1960s, programs for the gifted that included minority students were practically non-existent. There has been a gradual change in numbers, but the proportion of culturally diverse students placed in classes for those with mental disability far exceeds the proportion placed in classes for the gifted.

ACCEPTING NEW PARADIGMS

Identification

The strong adherence to the g factor of intelligence in determining the giftedness of students has made a paradigm shift in identification techniques difficult. In 1976, I designed a matrix with the concept of combining standardized and nonstandardized assessment strategies, such as the Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Stu-
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Students (Renzulli, Smith, Callahan, White, & Hartman, 1976) to look beyond achievement test scores or IQ for hidden potential. A refined version of the matrix defined more accurately this basic concept and included an assessment of human qualities of “school and non-school” achievements (Baldwin, 1984). This process of identification was accepted or modified by many school districts, but many felt that the matrix design did not provide the proper quantitative proof of giftedness. Proper use of the matrix gave administrators a total profile of the student and an opportunity to see giftedness in areas that were not academic in nature. Subsequent efforts by Frasier (1993), Harris and Ford (1991), Barker and Bernal (1991), and others have not been able to satisfy the need to quantify the presence of ability. This has been largely due to the criteria being used to indicate giftedness. Those who have resisted looking at a new paradigm have argued that looking at added criteria “waters down” gifted programs. However, advocates who have looked beyond the IQ test and have followed a belief that giftedness exists in many guises that cannot always be measured by a test, have brought diverse students of high potential into the programs for the gifted.

Because the paradigm for defining giftedness is shifting, it is important that the assessment tools used reflect criteria set by these shifts. Maker (1996) referred to an identification process called Discover. This strategy takes three “school house intelligences” listed by Gardner (1983)—spatial, logical mathematical, and linguistic—and adds structured and unstructured problem-solving tasks. This procedure requires training and personnel to be able to make judgments about the abilities of the students; however, it is a tremendous effort to address the inequity in identifying students from culturally diverse groups.

According to Scott, Deuel, Jean-Francois, and Urbano (1996),

ethnic minority gifted can be located through kindergarten screening programs which involve large numbers of children. Second, open-ended tasks which encourage fluency are the most promising. Third, verbal tasks which use familiar concepts and vocabulary do not necessarily discriminate against young ethnic minority gifted students. (p. 147)

This research was based on the idea that cognition was a good candidate to serve as a basis of a new test to identify minority students. Mills and Tissot (1995) also discussed the identification procedures to locate minority or culturally diverse students in their article, “Identifying Academic Potential in Students From Under-Represented Populations: Is Using the Ravens Progressive Matrices a Good Idea?” The Ravens Progressive Matrices have been used to locate culturally diverse students and holds some promise, but Mills and Tissot cautioned that:

difference among ethnic groups are still found on the test. Advanced Progressive Matrices (APM) should not be used to identify students for placement into a competitive academic setting for high ability students without some measure of their developed academic abilities and skills. (p. 209)

The efforts to find the proper identification procedure for selecting children from culturally different backgrounds mentioned earlier represent only a portion of the efforts
that are being made. Much still needs to be done. To begin to address proper identification methods of giftedness some important assumptions must be embraced:

1. Giftedness can be expressed through a variety of behaviors and the expression of giftedness in one dimension is just as important as giftedness expressed in another.
2. Intelligence is a broad concept that goes beyond language and logic to encompass a wide range of human abilities.
3. Carefully planned subjective assessment techniques can be used effectively along with objective measures.
4. Giftedness in any area can be a clue to the presence of potential giftedness in another area, or a catalyst for the development of giftedness in another area.
5. All cultures have individuals who exhibit behaviors that are indicative of giftedness.

Because the paradigm for defining giftedness is shifting, processes for further developing assessment strategies and tools should reflect criteria set by these shifts and should include the following:

- Inclusion of parents in understanding the concepts of giftedness (Karnes, 1984).
- Training of teachers to look for behaviors that are indicative of problem-solving and creative skills. Clark (1988, pp. 225–226) listed several behaviors for teachers to look for as indicators of giftedness being shown (a) cognitively, (b) through visual and performing arts, (c) creatively, (d) academically, and (e) through leadership skills.
- Careful analysis of assessment strategies being proposed to determine if the assessment captures the meaning that has been accepted for giftedness.
- Use of portfolios of experiences and achievements as part of assessment.
- A combination of standardized or traditional and nontraditional assessment protocols.
- A change in the perception of innate abilities of students of different cultural groups.
- Recognition of potential that can be developed to superior levels rather than focusing on deficits.
- The use of multiple criteria for assessing ability levels and potential.
- Recognition of giftedness other than that which is referred to as “school house giftedness.”

PROGRAM PLANNING

Curriculum Design

Identification is the first step toward helping us discover who we are designating as gifted students, who need a different approach to learning, which is what helps us plan the delivery system for these students.
Differentiated curriculum is the accepted mantra for programs for the gifted; however, differentiation must be inclusive of the histories and significant events of the cultures of students selected for the program. Inclusion is the operative word here in that it is not being suggested that there be a separate curriculum for culturally diverse students, but one that students of all cultures will explore in a differentiated manner.

Any curriculum design must include a belief and subsequent goals that reflect this belief. This is particularly important if inclusion is going to occur. For example, some such belief statements might read:

- Historical and contemporary events that recognize the contributions of a wide range of people broaden the scope of knowledge with which all students can become involved.
- Insight into the world and environment of other cultures develops a wider sensitivity to those with whom students must interact.

An example of goals that might follow these belief statements would be:

- To provide for gifted students of color an opportunity to experience differentiated curriculum experiences that draw on their cultures.
- To help students of all ethnic groups understand the bravery, the strength of character, and cleverness of various cultures, despite negative circumstance.
- To increase the knowledge of all students regarding the contributions of all ethnic groups.

Belief statements establish the philosophy or theoretical milieu out of which planning will take place. The goals should indicate what outcomes would reflect the foregoing beliefs.

Instructional System

The instructional system includes the teacher, parents, the environment, and the activities that are derived from the beliefs and the goals. There are three models that enhance the instructional planning and make it inclusive for culturally diverse students as well as respond to the beliefs and goals. One model would be sensitivity enhancement that would involve the students in activities such as simulations, debates, analysis of rhetoric, and designs of answers to the problems. The second model would be an information processing one including library research using original documents, interviews, the collection of materials for information, role assumptions, field trips, or time capsule strategies. This model would give students the background necessary for achieving the goals and objectives that would be established. The third model would be the concept development one that would involve the use of materials from different cultures instead of relying on the traditional materials provided in most schools. The effects of war can be taught through the stories of persons such as African Americans and Native Americans, as well as through the traditional materials on war. The concept of numbers can be taught through...
the Egyptian heritage of Arabic numbers as we use them today and the concept of numbers and their application in developed and undeveloped countries of Africa and other less developed ethnic communities. How the poet or storyteller captures the feel of his or her environment can be seen through the stories of authors from various ethnic groups. Sociopolitical parallels, language structures, graphic and performing arts of the world, and family life are some of the concepts that can be taught by using a combination of materials from different cultures with that which is standard for most classrooms.

Creative problem-solving processes are among those qualities that are not easily quantified; however, it is an important element in the development of ability in students. Starko (1995) listed several types of activities that should be considered in planning activities to foster the development of the potential giftedness in students, as follows: metaphorical thinking, which makes it possible for students to use one idea to express or explain another; visualization, in which students are able to visualize things they cannot see and playing with mental images; and finding order in chaos, in which students prefer visual images that are complex over those that are simple.

Teachers

Teachers are the important part of the instructional system because it will be their task to recognize abilities that might be quantifiable and plan activities to meet those needs. In preparing teaching strategies, attention must be paid to specific objectives that can be designed by the teacher and students following the goals and belief statements as listed in the previous examples. Involving students in the classroom planning for the achievement of goals will enhance the development of the specific objectives for the day or the week. An example of a specific objective is, “Students will be able to develop an appreciation for the interdependence of all ethnic groups.” The teacher should have a “compass” to guide him or her, but it should not be limiting. Inclusion of higher thought processes, as recommended by Renzulli (1977), is a part of the instruction that helps students think more constructively. Baldwin (1971), however, found that minority students who had spent some time with lower level thought processes were much more successful in developing new ideas, synthesizing concepts, and evaluating concepts presented to them. This is why the importance of information and sensitivity enhancement in this instructional process needs to be kept in mind. A strong foundation of information and understanding is important in helping students to develop a value system that will reflect a synthesis of knowledge necessary for higher level thinking.

It is important in this discussion to point out that there are many intervening variables that impact the ability of cultural diverse students to show potential and respond traditionally to classroom expectations. These variables are often overlapping and unfortunately some of these students might have encountered them all. They are (a) socioeconomic deprivation, a condition of legal or de facto denial of social interaction combined with substandard housing and jobs; (b) cultural diversity, which is a condition of racial, ethnic, language, or physical differences from the dominant culture; and (c) geographic isolation, which is a condition of being geographically located away from the mainstream of society.
Although there will be some students in the culturally diverse group who have not been working up to their potential, it is important that teachers understand that there is as much difference within groups of culturally diverse individuals as there is between groups. Therefore, a blanket generalization should not be made about all of the gifted students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Those students who will need additional help in reaching their potential should not be treated to drill and memorization to catch up with their peers. Within the class of gifted students instruction should focus on vertical–diagonal movement for those students needing to catch up, and horizontal–diagonal movement for those who do not have the academic deficits, but are ready for depth of study as well as growth. Figure 1 shows how this movement allows for in-depth (horizontal) activities as well as "catch-up activities" (vertical) while advancing to higher levels of learning.

For those students in both groups found in Figure 1, compacting, or the use of telescoping procedures, will allow them to move forward at a pace that suits their experience and ability levels. Compacting will allow the child to display what skills he or she has already gained and does not need to repeat. This would allow the child to move on to advanced materials or have time for research and work on his or her favorite project (Reis et al., 1992). Telescoping is another process that can be used. It will provide an opportunity for the instructor to teach a concept once and show its use with many modes. For example, fractions, percentages, and decimals carry the same concept though presented in different modes. Instead of teaching each of these areas separately, they can be taught at the

![Diagram showing vertical-diagonal and horizontal-diagonal movement of students.](image-url)