Promoting Opportunity, Rigor, and Achievement for Underrepresented Students

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Kids show you their potential, but they don't show you all of their gifts. It is our job as an educator, as a teacher, as a mentor to help bring those gifts to fruition.

—Mary M. Frasier

Gifted children can be found in all cultural groups and at every socio-economic level; however, attempts to identify them have been and continue to be an issue (Ford, 2013; Frasier, 1991; Passow & Frasier, 1996; Torrance, 1974). In the field of gifted education, scholars and practitioners alike have raised awareness of the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and those from low-income households (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], 2010; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2007). Students from low-income households typically
do not have access to traditional preschool enriching learning activities at home (Barton, 2003), which in turn contributes to underachievement (Sirin, 2005) and underrepresentation (Ford, 1995). The majority of children in low-income and poor families are children of color, particularly Black and Hispanic students, and these students face the additional burden of racial discrimination (Kitano, 2007). Eligibility for these students using traditional intelligence measures may not allow for their abilities or talents to be captured. For educators working with low-income students, it is of great importance that we approach identification from a strengths-based perspective rather than a deficit one, including appropriate assessments for identification (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012).

This chapter (a) defines the population of high-potential students who are underrepresented in gifted and advanced programs, including students from low-income backgrounds; (b) discusses the contextual elements that exist for these students; and (c) provides guidelines and examples of programs and services that might be used to help reverse the issues around underrepresentation.

DEFINITION OF UNDERREPRESENTATION

Ford (2014) recommended that educators use the Relative Difference in Composition Index (RDCI) to compute underrepresentation for a racial or cultural group. Underrepresentation refers to a negative discrepancy when the total percentage of gifted program enrollment of a student group is less than the group’s actual percentage in the school enrollment. The key question is: What is the difference between the composition (percentage) of students in gifted education compared to the composition of students in general education? When using the RDCI approach to examine underrepresentation, educators are permitted to compare disproportionality of and among various groups. The RDCI for underrepresentation is computed as

\[
\frac{((\text{Composition} \%) \text{ of Group A in gifted education}) - ((\text{Composition} \%) \text{ of Group A in general education})}{(\text{Composition} \%) \text{ of Group A in general education})} \times 100.
\]

For example, the 2009 percentage of African American students in public schools represented 16.7%, but only 9.9% of the population of gifted education programs. Using the RDCI formula, African American students were underrepresented by almost 41%. Recent trends in gifted education enrollment statistics nationwide suggest that African American students tend to be more severely underrepresented than Hispanic students in gifted education programs as indicated in Table 11.1.

\[
\frac{9.9 - 16.7}{16.7} \times 100 = -41
\]
Table 11.1  Example Calculation of the RDCI for Student Enrollment in U.S. Gifted Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>2009 Percentage National Enrollment</th>
<th>2011 Percentage National Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: UR = Underrepresentation

According to Ford (2014), “a discrepancy would be considered significant when underrepresentation exceeds a threshold determined legally or by decision and policy makers” (p. 145). (For a more detailed discussion on determining thresholds using Ford’s Equity Index, see Ford, 2014.)

Underrepresentation is a complex phenomenon that is impacted by many issues, particularly income level (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2007). Poverty is a recursive problem that is tied to underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted education, and we have not adequately met the needs of low-income students by means of identification, programming, and sustainability. According to the U.S. Department of Education, high-poverty schools are defined as public schools where more than 75.0% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL), and low-poverty schools are defined as public schools where 25.0% or fewer of the students are eligible for FRPL (Kena et al., 2015). Underrepresentation is most severe in low-income schools, and greater effort is needed to improve enrollment trends and best address students’ needs.

RATIONALE

The greater the incongruence between the culture of the home, the community, and the school, the more difficult and negative will be students’ educational experiences.

—Donna Ford (2013, p. 17)

Identifying potential and talent in underrepresented populations has been a concern in gifted education for decades. Much of the literature around underrepresented gifted and talented students has explored the risk of underachievement, issues with identification (eligibility and assessment measures), funding disparities, and types of interventions that have shown
effectiveness in meeting the needs of underserved students (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). However, too often in the gifted education literature, the characteristics of underrepresented students are overgeneralized and viewed as monolithic in nature. This narrow view does not take into account how income intersects with culture, ethnicity, geographic location, family values, and the larger society.

Due to these structural and cultural disconnects between educators and families that occur in many Title I schools, the primary concern among teachers and administrators has centered on raising the achievement of the lowest-performing students and closing the achievement gap among subpopulations at the basic level rather than developing the talent of all youth they serve. It has been suggested that focusing on basic levels of cultural competence in underrepresented students who perform low on tests and that raising expectations for achievement may indirectly affect the academic growth in school (Ford & Whiting, 2008). Due to the fact that a teacher’s time and attention, our most critical educational resource, has been focused solely on struggling students (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012), we are faced with missing the mark on developing students with talent and high potential in these schools. The challenges presented demonstrate a lack of focus on social justice for underrepresented gifted students in our low-income schools. According to Bell (2007), “social justice is a vision of the world where the rights of all are valued, respected, and accepted and when access to the opportunities and resources necessary to be your best self is unrestricted” (p. 1). Therefore, as educators, we must be diligent in our quest for just classrooms where students with gifts and talents are valued regardless of their background, environment, and influences.

Identifying factors contributing to the underrepresentation of CLD students continues to stymie educators, administrators, and practitioners. Contextual influences such as economic status, culture, and language impact learning and how we view our students. Some students readily demonstrate their gifts, but for others, the demonstration of their gifts and talents may not be recognized in a traditional sense or easily observed (Ford, 2013). Without proper training or awareness of how contextual influences impact learning, teachers and counselors may potentially miss or overlook students for identification. If educators continue to exclude contextual factors from the equation of identifying students, underrepresentation of students who are culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse will continue to persist.

**STUDENT PORTRAITS**

To get a better sense of what underrepresented gifted students from low-income and/or culturally and linguistically different schools might be like, let us take a look at Todrick and Emilia.
Todrick

Todrick is a fourth-grade, nine-year-old African American male who lives in a single-parent, low-income household. He has two older siblings (middle and high school) and attends a Title I elementary school with students from predominantly low-income families. His stature is solid, but he is reserved in many respects. He is somewhat laid-back in that he goes with the flow of the classroom and responds to teacher directions well, and he also has excellent manners. He works exceptionally well with his peers in small-group settings, but seems to be frustrated or distracted when working with a whole group or classroom.

Todrick’s high-potential traits, aptitudes, and behaviors might go unnoticed or not be observed because he struggles in reading. However, by taking a closer look, one can observe a great deal. Although somewhat reserved, when Todrick speaks, he takes the command of his audience much like a leader. He uses inflection and captures the attention of the students or teachers around him. A small group suits his learning preferences better because he is able to negotiate the attention of his peers. In fact, he tends to shut down in the general classroom setting or when others reject or downplay his ideas; and, at times, he resists the direction of the classroom teacher. He always is able to add excellent responses to questions that are both relevant and logical. For example, when studying issues related to disease, he connected the discussion to the current issue of Ebola and raised thought-provoking questions for the class. He sometimes stumbles when he is not able to convey his complex thinking or rationale to others when tackling a problem situation. For example, he proposed a rather abstract idea to a small group of students who were not able to understand or make the leap in the direction he was going, and then his peers mocked him. He was extremely frustrated and shut down.

Todrick has exceptional insight, is able to draw inferences, and is keenly observant in both academic subjects and in the context around him. Torrance (1974; Torrance & Torrance, 1978) recognized that to motivate students from underserved groups and promote their engagement in advanced programs, an emphasis on community and culture can accompany the development of creative problem-solving skills that undergird a future orientation. In a Community Problem Solving (CmPS) Program setting, Todrick was able to sense problems within the context of the area of concern. This was a sophisticated skill that many of the bright students in the group were unable to do. He was able to problematize the health risks and safety concerns about his community. Most of his peers headed straight into solution generation, but he was able to sense the problems in the situation. He enjoys thinking and working creatively. When given a task in idea generation, Todrick contributes ideas that are both useful and novel. During the preparation of a collaborative rap about bullying in his CmPS group, Todrick suggested, “I think that it might be good to use ‘treat others like you want to be treated’ to represent how kids should act about bullying.” This insightful connection to the golden rule was a perfect fit for
the rap and in keeping with the overall project on bully prevention. When participating in a task around nutrition, he devised a creative way to get children his age more active by creating a school competition involving Wii Fit games, complete with a reward system.

Todrick’s classroom placement lacks an environment where creativity and higher-level thinking are encouraged. In a school where there is a predominant focus on intervention, he struggles to enjoy school or find a place to exhibit these traits, aptitudes, and behaviors. He has, however, found a place in his CmPS group where he can use his creative and leadership talents. Most recently, he led the group in the delivery of the proposed action plan to the principal who responded with a resounding, “Absolutely!” Without this small-group environment, Todrick could certainly be missed in any formal referral processes or nomination for gifted education programming. To identify students like Todrick, who often fly under the radar, schools can follow the guiding principles for serving high-potential, low-income students so that we might capitalize on the talents of all high-potential students in these schools.

**Emilia**

Emilia is a six-year-old student attending a school with a highly diverse, mixed-income population. Her school sits adjacent to a local university, and many of the students who attend this school have parents who came to the United States to attend graduate school. Emilia was originally from Guatemala, and she arrived speaking almost no English. Emilia received services from the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at her school where she began to rapidly pick up English. When gifted referral season opened at the school, Emilia’s ESL teacher persistently advocated for her, citing that she was a student with an incredible memory, a thirst for learning, and high motivation.

Emilia is small and quiet with big brown eyes. She keeps very much to herself and is reserved most times in class. However, when a special program began in her first-grade classroom, other adults began to see similar high-ability attributes observed by the ESL teacher. In this same year that she moved to the school, her class participated in a university-community partnership program centered on creativity. Every week, doctoral students came in to facilitate experiences using creativity strategies through the content areas. This unique opportunity has allowed Emilia’s teacher to sit back and observe her strengths as the guest teacher facilitates the creativity lessons. Emilia’s teacher quickly began to see her ability to think flexibly and come up with original responses. In addition, she describes Emilia as highly creative, being able to produce many ideas and make connections in her learning that age-mates are not able to.

Never before had her teacher been able to recognize Emilia’s keen sense of humor, likely because of the language barrier; but with these specialized lessons, her teacher began to see her use humor and whimsy and make connections between ideas in ways that she had not yet observed.
For example, her teacher commented that

in a recent lesson highlighting force fit, or metaphorical thinking, Emilia connected the idea of the character Wimberly from Kevin Henkes’s book *Wimberly Worried* with the idea of a hurricane (weather) currently being studied in science. Emilia shared an artistic response to the lesson noting that Wimberly was like a hurricane because at first she was so worried and nervous, like the swirling of a hurricane, and then feeling more peaceful, like the calm after the storm. No one in my room was able to make this creative leap.

This opportunity to observe students really allowed the teacher to better understand Emilia. In fact, her observations prompted her to connect with the school art teacher and ESL teacher to see if they had similar experiences with Emilia in class and what their thoughts were regarding her abilities. The whole program experience allowed a group of teachers to come together to recognize traits, aptitudes, and behaviors in Emilia in a way that had not been seen before. Without this experience and the advocacy from a variety of teachers in her setting, Emilia’s gifts might have gone unrecognized.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND ATTRIBUTES THAT DEFINE HIGH QUALITY**

A high-quality program promotes equitable practices and grants access to opportunities that otherwise would not be available for students from underrepresented populations. Moreover, all personnel within the school (e.g., administrators, specialists, classroom teachers, counselors, paraprofessionals) share the responsibility of collaborating and working with community members to identify and develop talents of underrepresented students like Todrick and Emilia in culturally responsive ways. Ford, Moore, and Milner (2005) identified testing issues, teacher referral issues, social issues, and issues surrounding policies and procedures as contributing variables to the underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs.

Dr. Mary Frasier (1997), researcher and advocate for identifying and developing talents of CLD students and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, developed a system to address barriers that circumvent talent development. We are borrowing from Frasier’s (1991) Four A’s framework—**attitude, access, assessment, and accommodations** (which we are calling adaptations)—as a foundation to counter concerns of inequitable practices within a district to fit the needs of underserved students.

**Attitude**

The attitude of an individual as well as the collective sentiment in the local community or society can influence dramatically how gifted students experience school, making attitude the most crucial component of Frasier’s
framework. *Attitude* refers to the mental position, feeling, or emotion toward a low-income or CLD student. To truly recognize the potential of underrepresented students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, educators must combat negative assumptions and stereotypes about different communities and families (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Rather than focusing on student deficits or what is lacking, those working in high-quality gifted programs shift the focus toward uncovering and supporting student potential that manifests in culturally different ways (Torrance, 1974). As noted in the NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards, educators are encouraged to engage in helping students developing identities supportive of achievement through positive learning environments.

Remaining open and flexible is key because potential manifests in different ways, and the manifestation of talent in underrepresented students from low-income and CLD backgrounds will more than likely differ from that of White and middle-class populations. To promote equitable classrooms and programming, it is imperative to focus on the strengths of students.

In high-quality programs and services, the following principles affect attitudes in positive ways:

- Educators are responsible for shifting attitudes from a deficit thinking paradigm to a strengths-based perspective and promoting this mindset for all students throughout the community.
- Administrators and teachers recognize that demonstrations of potential traits, aptitudes, and behaviors such as humor, creativity, reasoning, and problem solving may be revealed in a positive or negative manner in low-income and CLD students. It is of great importance that negative displays of potential not be overlooked.
- Teachers and administrators need to engage families (nuclear, blended, and extended) representing the school community, as well as groups such as afterschool care, churches, and neighborhoods about what it means to identify and develop talent in students with high potential.
- Schools need to retain and train effective equity-minded educators of gifted education programs, particularly in Title I schools. Building and sustaining relationships between and among the faculty, administration, students, and families in support of equity for underrepresented students in gifted and talented education programs is critical to the overall success of high-potential students.

**Access**

Recognizing gifted potential among underrepresented groups does not happen in a vacuum; several factors must intersect for students to develop their talent, and it begins with prioritizing access for all students to appropriately challenging and engaging learning opportunities. Frasier (1997) posited that there are several factors that limit access of low-income and CLD students for gifted programming and services: (a) low academic expectations held by educators and others, (b) low rates of referrals, (c) the
inability of educators to recognize gifted behaviors when exhibited by low-income and CLD students, and (d) the lack of regard given to the influence of culture and environment on the manifestations of gifts and talents in different racial and ethnic groups and the effects this has on teacher referrals in the identification process.

The NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards urge gifted education professionals to grant equal access to a comprehensive assessment system that allows all students, including CLD students, to demonstrate diverse characteristics and behaviors that are associated with giftedness. If students cannot gain access to services through a referral, they cannot be assessed for services.

In settings where CLD and low-income students have equal access to gifted programming and services, the following hold true:

- Educators take into consideration how the structural and institutional barriers (e.g., racism, elitism) and cultural factors of the school and community influence how services and programming will be perceived.
- Schools and districts provide a variety of coordinated professional development opportunities for educators to recognize and nurture high-potential learners within the community. The teacher development effort is ongoing and focuses on continual growth in understanding and supporting the local population of underserved low-income students with talent (including changes in enrollment trends).
- Educators continually analyze the local barriers that may exist for students in their school by combating underlying assumptions of the students, families, and community and by strategizing plans to overcome those barriers. They conscientiously examine and use local data to develop innovative plans when state policies focused on state and national trends limit capacity for underrepresented students to gain access to gifted education services.

Assessment

Underrepresentation of Black, Hispanic, Native American, and English language learners in gifted and talented programs and Advanced Placement (AP) courses continues to be a reoccurring and pervasive problem in schools (Ford, 1998; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). Expanding access to gifted programs and services is intimately linked to the way in which student abilities and talents are evaluated and identified through the assessment process. For decades, gifted education has supported a broader, expanded conception of giftedness (Gardner, 1983; Renzulli, 1978; Sternberg, 1985; Torrance, 1974, 1977), and very few researchers and theorists continue to accept an isolated IQ or achievement test score based on national norms as a valid measure of a student’s capacity for doing well over the course of a lifetime (Renzulli &
Reis, 2012). Nevertheless, in many schools, identification for gifted programs is still heavily tied to performance on intelligence and/or achievement tests (Cross & Dockery, 2014; Renzulli & Reis, 2012).

A high-quality program should institute multiple criteria (e.g., creativity, leadership, achievement, mental ability, motivation), multiple measures to assess each criterion, and multiple pathways to determine eligibility for gifted program participation (Frasier, 1997). Why? Giftedness and talent are multidimensional constructs that manifest differently in racially, culturally, and linguistically different groups. Renzulli and Reis (2012) asserted that IQ or achievement scores can be used as one of a number of criteria, but should not form the entire basis in the decision-making process for identification of gifted programs and services, particularly for underrepresented students. (See Chapter 4 for additional guidance on constructing identification procedures.)

The tests used for gifted identification and services have been widely criticized and blamed for the underrepresentation of culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students. There have been several recommendations to help the field develop better identification systems that promote equitable practices and not allow IQ or achievement tests to act as smokecreens or “gatekeepers” (Ford, 2013; Renzulli & Reis, 2012). The use of local norms (i.e., calculated by school and grade level) has been recommended as an identification system to compare students who share similar background characteristics or learning opportunities (Lohman, 2005; Renzulli & Reis, 2012), essentially comparing apples to apples. The use of nonverbal assessments has also been a widely recommended method to identify underrepresented students (Naglieri, 2008; Naglieri & Ford, 2003). It also has been recommended to use alternative or nontraditional instruments believed to measure the same construct (e.g., creativity; Baldwin, 2011; Torrance, 1971), as well as using a range of scores to increase the representation of culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students (Ford, 2011). Educators must be equipped with and trained to use the district and state policies designed to foster equity in gifted education assessment programming and services (NAGC, 2010). Additionally, students with identified needs must represent diverse backgrounds and reflect the total school population of the district.

In high-quality programs and services, the following apply:

- School and district administrators consider the population they serve; they commit to understanding the strengths and limitations of the instruments used, and select a variety of instruments that are appropriate for low-income and CLD students in their community.
- Teachers and other persons eligible to make referrals receive professional development or workshop training on the identification process and how traits, aptitudes, and behaviors may manifest in culturally, linguistically, and ethnically different groups.
- Educators use multiple criteria or alternative assessments such as portfolios and performance-based tasks, taking into account local norms (e.g., by race, gender, language, income level) as a standard.
Adaptations

When identification and access to services are expanded, adjustments must also be made in curriculum and teaching so that learning opportunities within and beyond the gifted program reflect and support the culturally and linguistically different group of students it serves. In a high-quality gifted program, educators use and adapt program design and curriculum experiences by way of creating opportunities for students to mirror ways in which potential manifests in the community (Ford, 2013). Stimulating, engaging classrooms and programs where students have the opportunity to explore their community, take risks, problem solve, and think critically and constructively about their community provide the necessary learning experiences for students to be considered for and thrive within gifted education programming (NAGC, 2010). Community engagement is an important pathway for CLD students to bridge gaps between home and school culture and to develop competencies that support success in academically rigorous advanced courses and programs. Adaptations for underrepresented students must include a focus on principles of culturally responsive education, empowerment, and cultural competence (Ford, 2013; Ford & Whiting, 2008), preparing CLD students to emerge from barriers to equity that our diverse nation presents (Grantham, 2012). Ford and Whiting (2008) advocated that we must ask of all students, particularly gifted and advanced CLD:

- Are students aware of and sensitive to cultural differences?
- How comfortable are they in working with classmates who come from cultural backgrounds that differ from their own?
- Are gifted students sensitive to and interested in social justice and equity issues? (p. 105)

To cultivate a school climate that embodies the aforementioned traits, administrators and teachers must embrace the community and include culturally relevant curriculum, alternative programming, and possible university-school partnerships that support the objectives of the district, emphasizing achievement, rigor, and creativity (Graham, Hines, Anderson, Catalana, & Luckey, 2015), which can in turn set the precedence of excellence for all students, creating equitable opportunities. Adapting environments and instructional activities that encourage students to express their diverse characteristics and behaviors are critical to meeting curriculum-planning and instruction standards (NAGC, 2010).

In high-quality programs and services, the following apply:

- Educators adapt traditional curriculum with culturally responsive approaches. It is of great importance that stakeholders understand the cultural differences in learning preferences and how underrepresented students demonstrate learning.
- Schools and districts use alternative programs to focus on talent development in lieu of programs only for identified students. These programs should be crafted based on the context and population of the school.
• Schools and districts should provide affective education (social and emotional development) focused on identity, self-concept, self-efficacy, peer interactions, and teacher-student relationships that takes into account cultural issues such as race, ethnicity, language, and gender background of individuals.
• Educators position creativity as a common language in schoolwide programming to motivate, engage, and build opportunity for all students, particularly underrepresented groups, to demonstrate their learning and connect school and community environments.

EXAMPLE IN NEED OF REVISION

Samantha Frost has been a teacher of the gifted at a predominantly low-income, Black, intervention-focused school for the past 5 years. She has provided services for from 4 to 15 Black students, depending on the year (approximately 1% to 3% of the total student population). The district in which Samantha teaches serves approximately 14,000 students and, of that population, there are about 1,600 identified students for the gifted program, most of whom are White, although the total district is majority Black. Calculating the percentage of students identified in the district at 11%, one can easily see how low the identified gifted students are at Samantha’s elementary school.

Over time, Samantha has developed a system of using products and portfolio assessment to help identify gifted students, but increasingly she has found that teachers are nominating fewer and fewer students each year. Additionally, due to the transience of the community, it has been difficult to build and sustain the number of students in the gifted program or to develop relationships with family members. Finally, the model that her administrative team required for the program, with so few students identified, was that she would “push-in” to classrooms and serve as an intervention specialist. This is because there is typically only one gifted student per classroom, if any. Although the pressure to find and identify gifted students is large, the ability to try new things to achieve that objective is small.

MAKEOVER EXAMPLE

Challenged by the expectations, and feeling that her efforts are falling short in building programs for high-ability students at her school, Samantha decided to reach out to the administrative team for guidance and support. Working together, they used Frasier’s (1997) four attributes (attitude, access, assessment, adaptations) as a framework to assist in reconceptualizing gifted programming to provide more equitable opportunities for the school’s students.

Thinking about the attitude of the teaching staff and the tendency to focus on deficits in a high-stakes environment, the principal recommended
contacting faculty at the local university to collaborate and problem solve. Eagerly, the faculty from the university committed to working with Samantha and a small group of teachers who were willing to step outside the school culture and think outside the box. The first initiative that the partnership established was an on-site class where students from the university would come to the school to participate as enrichment specialists helping implement creativity lessons that were embedded in the content areas.

Samantha quickly realized that the effort to engage more faculty members was gaining speed now that a small cadre of interested teachers was developing insight and expertise around teaching students with high potential. Other teachers at the school were interested in designing services to help meet the needs of the students, and there was an undercurrent of attention on the issues Samantha had struggled so much to get faculty to understand. Teachers were aware and interested in learning more about how to focus on strengths and adjust their teaching to better meet the needs of students with high ability in their classrooms. With this gradual but important shift in attitude, practices that expanded access to programming and services also grew. Samantha was able to begin more individual conversations with teachers about particular students and how they wanted to refer them for formal testing. What began as conversations about how to formally nominate students, next translated into conversations about what the teacher could do within the classroom to help meet the needs or develop the talent within a particular student.

Recognizing an opportunity to expand access further and refine their assessment process, the principal worked with Samantha to organize schoolwide professional learning with the university faculty on how to observe and address the traits, aptitudes, and behaviors of students from economically and culturally diverse populations. Teachers in all grade levels began to buy into this dynamic thinking and were inspired to also begin using the creativity strategies in their classrooms. Even though Samantha bought into the dynamic thinking mindset, she surprised herself to find that she, too, still let deficit thinking creep in and had to continually check her own assumptions. Eventually, these experiences led a group of interested teachers to consider what adaptations needed to be made in gifted programming and general education settings to better engage and challenge the many low-income and CLD students in the school.

From those initial experiences around developing and designing lessons using creativity, Samantha helped establish a CmPS team with some fourth graders, an accelerated math program for fifth graders, an afterschool leadership program for second and third graders, and a science lab for kindergarten students using creativity and critical thinking. Each of these programs grew organically from the work Samantha and the grade-level teachers began, shifting the engagement and motivation for students. What had historically been an intervention-focused school was now changing to a school that found ways to weave achievement, rigor, and creativity into the daily instruction and experiences of the students.
Serendipitously, what Samantha began to see was the embedded professional development that happened in the different programs that were established in the school. Teachers who hosted university students with creativity lessons began to ask how they could use more creativity strategies in their own teaching, while other faculty members sought more information about working with students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse populations. Over the summer, several teachers plan to attend a summer institute at the university digging deeper into the work of creativity and how to integrate it into the curriculum and services at the school.

The hope is that with continued collaboration and attention to the attributes of attitude, access, assessment, and adaptations, students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds will have equal opportunity to reach their full potential.

**ADVICE FOR GETTING STARTED**

The following list of questions is designed to aid in the process of data gathering and to guide conversations of a strategic planning group or task force as they work to design or revise a program for high-potential students from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds and who may come from low-income families and communities.

**Attitude**

- How do we shift the thinking among school faculty to one of student potential (dynamic thinking) versus what students cannot do (deficit thinking)?
- How do we help teachers understand their important role in the identification process as the nominator and advocate for a student from CLD and/or low-income backgrounds?
- How do we help educators understand what high potential is, what it looks like, and how it manifests in a school where most students come from high-poverty homes?
- What are the ways we can help the family and community understand the needs of and be engaged in the development of our high-potential students from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds?

**Access**

- In what ways can we help our faculty members increase the academic expectations they have for our students from low-income or CLD backgrounds?
- How can we provide ongoing professional development for our faculty members that enables them to recognize high-potential behaviors from our student population by race, language, and the like?
- What are ways that we can acknowledge the influence of culture and environment on teachers', parents', and students' willingness to refer underrepresented students for gifted services and programming?
Assessment

- How do we help teachers better understand the identification process through the lens of a multiple criteria and how each of those areas is evaluated in light of the trends in eligibility for underrepresented groups?
- By analyzing the current identification process, where do we see places for assessing problem solving in culturally relevant ways? What and where are our pitfalls in the process of evaluation that adversely impact underrepresented groups, and what are the necessary steps to improve the process? For example, are there alternative instruments that may be used? Or is there professional learning that might be given to teachers focusing on selecting appropriate instruments and interpreting results for underrepresented students using local norms?
- Working backward, how do we use programs and services to provide learning experiences that enhance the talents of our underrepresented groups and set them up for a better identification experience? For example, if creativity is a criterion for formal identification, how are we using creativity in the school and classroom context to build creative thinking and skills in underrepresented or low-income students?
- Have the instruments used for formal testing been fielded for strengths and limitations (e.g., by race, class, gender, language differences) related to underrepresented groups?

Adaptations

- How do we best address the differences in culturally, linguistically, and economically disadvantaged students within curriculum and programming designs that appeal to predominantly White middle-class populations?
- How do we shift educators’ thinking from trying to make students fit into the dominant structure of our school system and society to more strengths-based initiatives?
- How do we help our faculty honor students’ culture and adapt programs and services to develop their self-identity, achievement, and talent?

ADVICE TO THE SOLE PRACTITIONER

Designing a more equitable and robust program for high-potential students involves a high level of commitment, sensitivity, flexibility, and ability to problem solve. As a sole practitioner, you will need to enlist a team dedicated to building capacity for talent development at your school; no one person can do it alone. Connecting with others in your community and school will take time, but this investment in relationship building will yield benefits and greater support for both you and your students. A key
ingredient to the success of innovative programming and services at your
school begins with educating your administration on the issues and asking
them to help you meet the targets for your school.

Establishing relationships with other gifted teachers or school person-
nel in similar positions at "like" schools can also be a source of support.
Supporting each other as allies in the trial and error of implementing inno-
ватive programs and services can be extremely useful and supportive.
Last, understand your role as the sole practitioner. You are likely the expert
at your school on doing this work. Constantly challenge yourself, your
support team, your administration, and your school to do this work and
help provide the tools for which to do it. Asking the questions associated
with attitude, access, assessment, and adaptations will help guide the
work you do. Design, negotiate, and implement pilots of innovative ser-
ices that will allow students from low-income schools to actively partici-
pate in the equitable services that should be made available to them.
Create programs and services that appeal to the strengths of students in
your school by working with your support team, administration, parents,
and student stakeholders to complete a needs assessment.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Ford, D. Y. (2013). Recruiting and retaining culturally different students in gifted educa-
tion. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

In this book, Ford focuses on how to screen, refer, and/or assess culturally differ-
ent students, and well as methods and strategies to retain them. Ford provides
information on (a) colorblindness and cultureblindness and how these views
affect Black and Hispanic students, (b) underrepresentation and equity formulas,
(c) implications of deficit thinking, and (d) gifted programs and psychosocial
environments.

Frasier, M. M. (1997). Gifted minority students: Reframing approaches to their
identification and education. In N. Colangelo & G. A. Davis (Eds.), Handbook

Frasier advocates for the need for schools and programs to utilize multiple criteria
to identify minority students. Frasier also addresses problems affecting the iden-
tification and education of gifted minority students: access, assessment, accom-
modation, and attitudes. Frasier challenges the assessment procedures used and
offers methods for reframing this process. This chapter is important for educators
because it provides a synthesis of information undergirding the work that informs
contemporary work on underrepresentation.

high achievement of low-income, high-ability students. Washington, DC: National
Association for Gifted Children.

In this special NAGC report, Olszewski-Kubilius and Clarenbach provide an
overview of the state of low-income, high-ability students in our nation. The
authors identify barriers low-income, high-ability students face, as well as best
practices for identification, services, programs, and supportive school cultures.
REFERENCES


