

## Chapter 8

# A Social Justice Approach to Developing Equity and Diversity in Gifted Programming

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter encourages educators to expand boundaries and build new, innovative approaches to increasing equity and diversity in gifted programming. Using a social justice approach to gifted programming, the authors describe methods for overcoming barriers that have historically, and continue, to suppress access to appropriate services for underserved populations in gifted education. This chapter provides an impetus for educators to reflect on ways to build upon and improve existing structures to adopt and adapt practices that embrace an inclusive approach to gifted identification and programming.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The chapter begins with a brief look at long-held controversies pertaining to gifted identification and programming, which along with past injustices and unfair practices motivates us to closely examine our roles in the processes of serving diverse gifted learners. Controversies and biases toward gifted education in our wider education environment reinforce the reservations of many school administrators and can foster a lack of consideration for creating inclusive and sustainable gifted services (Mun, Ezzani, Lee, 2020). Perceptions that lead to these controversies can be influenced by stakeholders when they possess compelling data; data that highlights the striking imbalance of racial and ethnic groups represented in our gifted programs. An examination of the benefits and shortcomings of prevalent gifted program models offers suggestions to school administrators to consider when advocating for gifted program development.

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## *A Social Justice Approach to Developing Equity and Diversity in Gifted Programming*

A social justice framework provides insight and context into these weighty issues. Ultimately, the chapter brings to the forefront approaches for addressing obstacles to overcome exclusivity in gifted programming.

### **DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI)**

Although terms like diversity, equity and inclusion are used freely in education, this chapter reflects on how they specifically relate to educational practices in the schools. While reading this chapter on developing inclusive gifted programs, consider these general descriptions defined below within the context of the topics. These constructs are revisited throughout the chapter to examine their roles in building inclusive gifted programs.

*Table 1.*

<b>Diversity, Equity and Inclusion</b> <i>Generally Defined</i>	<b>Diversity, Equity and Inclusion</b> <i>as Related to Gifted Identification and Programming</i>
<b>Diversity</b> means the presence of differences that may include race, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and (dis)ability among individuals. Diversity is the presence of differences within a given setting.	<b>Diversity</b> means historically marginalized groups being included in a school's gifted services: identification procedures and programming options.
<b>Equity</b> means proactively promoting justice and fairness by opening access, opportunity, and advancement of previously marginalized groups. It requires impartiality within processes and procedures designed to eliminate barriers that have served as obstacles for participation of some groups.	<b>Equity</b> evaluates and finds best ways to minimize underrepresentation and create processes for identifying and serving underserved, diverse populations.
<b>Inclusion</b> is the outcome of creating environments in which diversity is welcomed and equity efforts are supported and valued.	<b>Inclusion</b> is being asked to take part in specific and meaningful activities that invite and honor diversity by welcoming and valuing one's participation in gifted services.

The DEI framework encourages reflection on current practices, procedures and personal perspectives. With this self-reflection, educators can consider and prioritize which areas need to be addressed within the school district most immediately. The process begins within each individual regardless of their role in education. Upon recognizing one's own role in perpetuating inequity with our schools' gifted programs, stakeholders can begin increasing awareness of what this means within the schools. This awareness presents the first step in changing minds and practices of those school administrators who oversee the process of developing gifted programming.

Creating inclusive gifted programs requires actively promoting equity and building diversity within the process and procedures taken when developing gifted services. This approach requires proactive measures that provide access and opportunity to all. Providing access and opportunity necessitates anti-bias, anti-racist and anti-stereotyping. Only when these mindsets are removed can equity in gifted programming be achieved.

Consider the following questions within the construct of diversity, equity and inclusion in gifted programs.

- Diversity: Consider who participates in the gifted programs at a given school or district.

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- Are they diverse in their student populations?
- Who is missing?
- Why are they missing?
- Who are we not even recognizing for consideration in our gifted programs?
- Equity: Look at the demographic data to decide exactly who is missing and how many more should be served.
  - Whose ability is not recognized based on our current placement procedures?
  - What conditions have we created that maintain the current majority in our programs?
  - What are people experiencing in our schools that isolate them and make them feel separated from others who are intellectually like themselves?
- Inclusion: Consider whose strengths are not being recognized by the present practices and programs.
  - Are our gifted programs diverse?
  - Does our gifted program encourage and advance equity?
  - Whose strengths will not be noticed because they are not what we see when we look at the majority group's characteristics?
  - Are we promoting a safe environment where everyone feels like they belong?

Addressing questions such as these begins the process of schools eliminating practices and policies that have disparate impacts on minoritized groups.

## **SET ASIDE**

The following describes an activity to use with a gifted education committee or stakeholder group working to develop or modify gifted programming in a school or district.

Activity: Reflecting on diversity, equity and inclusion in gifted program development.

1. Divide committee (stakeholder group) into three groups. Assign each group to one of the three constructs: diversity, equity and inclusion.
2. Each group examines the set of questions listed under each of the three constructs. Then each group shares out to the larger group.
3. Hold a full group discussion considering how these three constructs holistically impact each other.
4. Define action steps based on these discussions.

## **Criticisms and Controversies in Gifted Education Programming**

The field of gifted education is ripe with controversies, and these differences in thought directly impact gifted programming in the schools. Three common controversies include:

- inequitable entrance criteria into gifted programs;
- resistance against grouping practices;

- deficient funding for these students with exceptional learning needs.

With a long history of perpetuating inequality in our gifted programs, one might say that we have perfected the practice. Current data shows we are missing between 850,000 to nearly two million students of diversity in our gifted programs (Naglieri, 2020; Gentry, et al., 2020). Yet schools have continued with the same approaches that have caused this injustice in our schools throughout our history.

## Entrance Criteria Into Gifted Programs

Criticism and controversies surrounding admittance into gifted education programs have waxed and waned throughout the years. Central to concerns held by many relate to perceptions of elitism and selection processes that can lead to exclusivity in gifted programs that are disproportionately composed of White and Asian students. While identification practices can be remedied to become more equitable (e.g., Naglieri & Ford, 2003; Naglieri, Lansdowne & Brulles, 2022; Peters & Enggerand, 2017), schools must also consider how their gifted programs might be structured in ways that may not be welcoming to students of diversity. This understanding requires explicit training to decision-making leaders prior to beginning the processes of program requirements.

Gifted education is now at a turning point: one that requires educators to reach beyond current programs and practices. As the field strives to reverse past injustices in its schools, the concerns of students with outstanding talents from historically underserved populations must be at the forefront of the minds of those developing gifted services.

In an article published by Fordham Institute Flypaper, *The NYT Gifted Debate Needs to Expand*, Brandon Wright (2015) argues that gifted programs in themselves are not to blame for the inequities found within them. Rather, social issues that “plague low-SES communities are to blame—low-performing schools, a lack of social support, single-parent families, intergenerational poverty, and more” (Wright, 2015). Eliminating gifted programs in response to criticism and controversies surrounding gifted programs will not correct the disparities seen in the programs (Ford, 2007). On the contrary, it would harm all gifted students, including those from diverse populations and low-SES communities who do make it into such programs. Nobody stands to draw greater benefit from them than do our underserved populations (Wright, 2015). The solution is to improve upon the processes being used for selection purposes. Identify the obstacles, then create processes for identification, placement, and then build culturally responsive practices into the model of services being provided (Ford, Dickson, Davis, Lawson, Scott & Grantham, 2018).

## SET ASIDE

*For the purpose of this chapter, the terms “gifted services” and “gifted programs” can be defined as follows: gifted services are inclusive of all that the school districts do to support gifted education, including identification procedures, placement processes, and programming models; gifted programs describe the delivery model(s) used to serve students in the schools.*

## **Examining Perceptions**

Perceptions people hold can directly impact the building of equitable gifted programs. A few obstacles to equity in gifted programming are briefly described in this section:

- Ability vs. achievement
- English language learners
- Twice-exceptional students
- Diverse cultures

### **Ability vs. Achievement**

Educators have familiarity with the concepts of ability and achievement, but some may have difficulty distinguishing between them because they overlap in some ways. There are, however, many ways in which these constructs differ, and within these differences, we encounter possibilities for biases and misperceptions.

While the tests used to measure ability and achievement may share similarities (particularly in the verbal and quantitative test questions often used) the fundamental difference in the types of tests lies in their purpose. Ability tests predict future accomplishments, whereas achievement tests measure knowledge, most commonly, of what a student has learned in an educational setting (Naglieri, Lansdowne & Brulles, 2022). Consider that students in the United States may experience disadvantages that prevent educators from recognizing high ability and potential. These disadvantages include having limited English proficiency, being culturally diverse, and having had limited opportunities to learn, all of which present potential obstacles to high academic achievement. The disadvantage impacting achievement, however, is unrelated to the ability levels, or potential for learning that a child may have (Novak, Lewis, Weber, 2020).

A student might have a very high score on an ability test, yet may perform average, or even below average on an achievement test. The achievement test measures what the student knows, or has learned; whereas the ability test measures how well the student can problem solve (i.e. think). A student who is not currently achieving highly can earn a very high score on an ability test that measures how well a student thinks, such as the Naglieri General Ability Tests (Naglieri, Brulles & Lansdowne, 2021). This student simply needs expanded opportunities to achieve academically.

Many gifted programs require students to demonstrate both high ability and high achievement, which may not be possible for some of the marginalized groups noted above. Educators' mindsets, then, become the roadblocks that prevent these students with high ability from participating in gifted programs. Gifted program acceptance criteria requiring that high ability students also demonstrate levels of high achievement have blocked opportunities to students who have been historically left out of gifted programs (Novak, Lewis, Weber, 2020). Suggestions on how to overcome this obstacle are presented later in this chapter.

### **English Language Learners**

Although identification procedures are improving in many ways, English language learners (ELLs) remain under-served in prevalent gifted education programs for a variety of reasons. Gifted education programs that require students to demonstrate knowledge at advanced levels using acquired skills can add to the unequal educational opportunities available to ELL students. While inclusive of the previous

discussion on perceptions pertaining to ability vs. achievement, English language status adds another layer of complexity.

It is broadly assumed that students need to become proficient in English prior to being considered for placement into a gifted program. When gifted ELL students demonstrate average or below-average academic achievement, teachers may question their need for gifted education services. Students who are not yet proficient in English will naturally struggle with instruction that is heavily laden with language-based concepts; however, these same students may be able to think and problem solve at very complex levels (Brulles, Castellano & Laing, 2010). The discrepancy between achievement and ability for English language learners can result from students not yet having acquired the academic language necessary to work at levels consistent with how they think and/or students not having received instruction that is commensurate with their learning abilities (Brulles, et. al, 2010).

Many schools are beginning to determine which students to serve in programs for gifted and talented students using locally derived norms. This practice is highly recommended for schools with a diverse student population, especially in schools or grade levels with a significant number of students. Local norms<sup>1</sup> are used when a student's scores are compared to students in a similar group, i.e., in the same grade, in a school, or in a school district. Students identified to participate in gifted and talented programs based on local norms may not fit the state's gifted identification criteria. However, they may benefit from participating in instruction designed for learners with high ability, as this may designate that the student has high potential and therefore have advanced learning needs.

## Twice-Exceptional Students

In education, the term twice-exceptional refers to gifted individuals who also qualify for Special Education services based on a diagnosis from a psychologist. Oftentimes, twice-exceptional students become identified as such through testing administered by a school psychologist. While this group constitutes a significant population, there is no operational definition of twice-exceptionality (Baum, Schraeder & Owens (2017). Twice-exceptional students in general have varying levels of intellectual potential and a variety of disabilities including, for example, learning disabilities such as Dyslexia and Dysgraphia, and other disorders such as Autism Spectrum Disorders, and Attention Deficit Disorder. These disabilities manifest themselves in different ways (Naglieri & Otero, 2017) and can be influenced by gender, ethnicity, and environment.

Twice-exceptional learners may be able to think and process information at very high levels, but display challenges in routine activities, such as reading, writing, and organizing ideas and school work (Baum, Schraeder & Owen, 2017). They may also experience extremes in their behaviors and emotions. Due to their learning challenges schools are often reluctant to include these students in their gifted programs. Inclusionary program models, such as a self-contained gifted class or a gifted cluster class are often effective models for twice-exceptional students because fewer transitions occur in these models than in a pull-out or itinerant model. Regardless of the gifted program model, twice-exceptional students with documented high ability should be given equal opportunity to develop their strengths as well as their areas of challenge. Teaching to the intellectual level of the learner means that, to the extent possible, the student should be able to participate in the school's gifted program with support and training for the teacher by the Special Education department.

## **Diverse Cultures**

Castellano (2003) asserted that many culturally and linguistically diverse families with gifted children strive to build connections and assimilate into the mainstream culture while maintaining their own cultural links. These values result in some children remaining in regular school programs located in the home community instead of attending a gifted education program outside of their community. Parents of gifted learners from diverse cultures who opt out of gifted services provided outside the classroom or home school do not usually request alternative provisions, such as curriculum differentiation or accelerated schoolwork within their regular classroom (Brulles, Castellano & Laing, 2010). They are more likely to accept what has been assigned to them. The families' desire to become embedded into the community extends to the school setting and can inadvertently override potential educational benefits for their gifted youth.

Another obstacle that limits access to services for some from diverse cultures involves the expectation that older children provide care for their younger siblings when parents are working. Many parents rely on this assistance both inside and outside of the home. This custom may prevent some students from receiving appropriate instruction when it is provided away from the students' home school and also can keep students from participating in afterschool enrichment opportunities. The question becomes "How can schools enfranchise their diverse gifted learners while still honoring cultural differences?" (Brulles, et al., 2010).

## **National Efforts as Related to Gifted Programming**

The field of gifted education has recently increased efforts to highlight injustices that have caused disparities in representation. This movement is presently occurring through actions, research, and advocacy efforts and by reporting data that for far too long has been ignored. Resources listed here include the best and most current data available representing resources and supports schools can learn from for developing equitable gifted services. Data included within these resources underpin the immediate and dire need for action within the nation's schools. This section provides suggestions for accessing and using those available resources and supports.

Several of these timely and enlightening publications include:

- *Gifted Education in the United States: Laws, Access, Equity and Missingness Across the Country by Locale, Title I School Status, and Race* (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, Maeda & Pereira 2020). Data in this report exposes "perceptions of classism, racism, and the resulting elitism that have plagued our field for so many years" (p. ix) and "highlights past and current inequities in the field concerning race, income, and locale." The authors used OCR data from 2000, along with three census data sets from 2012, 2014, and 2016 to examine data from a variety of factors including race, Title I status, and geographic regions. The purpose of the report was to provide baseline data on where schools "fall on the access, equity, and missingness continua" (p.11). Their goal was to draw awareness to the public (school systems' and states') realities to "begin to develop action plans to mitigate underrepresentation and improve services" (p.11).
  - *Potential Impact on Gifted Programming*

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Included in the Executive Summary of the report are the following recommendations on how to use the study's results:

Through awareness of the problem, educators (and legislators) can act to:

- Ensure that all schools identify students with gifted and talents;
- Examine and improve rates of programming and identification in Title I schools; and
- Put into place equitable identification procedures and programming designed to develop and reveal talents among all children, and especially those that have been underserved for generations.
  - *Championing Equity and Supporting Social Justice for Black Students in Gifted Education: An Expanded Vision for NAGC* put forth in 2020 describes the NAGC's statement denouncing systemic racism and supporting racial justice in a plan of action to confront systemic racism and advance equity for Black students in gifted education.
    - *Potential Impact on Gifted Programming*

NAGC's strong statement demonstrates not only their own commitment to making equity and anti-racism central to their work; the statement is a testament to the goals of proactively influencing the field to change policies, minds and practices for this purpose. Their efforts as related to gifted programming now emphasize promoting, disseminating and expanding universal screening and use of local norms and influencing the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices and culturally relevant curricula.

- *Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)* - The CRDC provides documentation of detailed data tables where educators (and policymakers) can explore and analyze data and trends across schools and school districts throughout a state or the country.
  - *Potential Impact on Gifted Programming*

This information can highlight areas in which change in practice is needed in a specific school or district, such as, learning how many students are taking specific advanced level courses and comparing those students based on their ethnicity.

- *2018-2019 State of the States in Gifted Education Report* - The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted (CSDPG) conducted this survey to explore if and how states provide and support programs for gifted and talented students. The report represents a snapshot of gifted education across the nation during the academic year 2018-2019. The report includes data from all states in the following categories:
  - State education agency personnel and funding
  - Factors impacting gifted education
  - Definition of gifted and talented students
  - Information about the state's gifted student population
  - Programs and services for gifted students
  - Personnel training requirements
  - Accountability

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- *Potential Impact on Gifted Programming*

Educators and policymakers can use this data when advocating for improvements in particular areas. Having data demonstrating how the different states are providing services, accessing funding, and interfacing between school districts and state education agencies can increase awareness and understanding of possible actions when working to strengthen efforts in these areas.

- *The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (Javits)* initiated in Congress in 1988 as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and was most recently re-authorized through ESEA to support the development of talent in U.S. schools. The Javits Act is the only federal program dedicated specifically to gifted and talented students. JAVITS is a federally funded grant that does not fund local gifted education programs directly but supports research projects that can increase equity and diversity in the schools.

- *Potential Impact on Gifted Programming*

While there is no direct impact on the schools, the projects' researchers and investigators work with local education agencies and state education departments to disseminate findings and share project outcomes in ways that can support schools' efforts by providing examples that schools can replicate and implement.

- *NAGC's Javits-Frasier Teacher Scholars Program* is a unique professional development opportunity for teachers, school counselors/psychologists, and others who work in Title I schools and are passionate about helping all gifted children. This scholarship program supports teachers, school psychologists, or school counselors who work in a Title I school by providing complementary convention attendance (including travel expenses), mentorship by a leader in the field, and opportunities to connect with the NAGC community. Applicants accepted for this program must provide evidence of:
  - A desire and commitment to advocate for and develop the gifts and talents of culturally and linguistically diverse students in their schools or school districts.
  - Clear indication of potential to serve as an educational leader for culturally and linguistically diverse students in the school and community setting.
  - Strong capacity to become educationally productive in ways that meet the learning needs of gifted students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
    - *Potential Impact on Gifted Programming*

Upon returning from the convention, Javits Frasier Scholars are expected to provide information, training, and support for other educators at their Title I schools. The intent of the program is to broaden the reach of the scholars' newly gained information and ideas to help change minds and practices that support equity and promote diversity in the schools' gifted services.

## **Stakeholder Group Influences**

Regardless of the program model selected or the services provided, it is essential for schools to monitor the success of the program using student group demographic and Title I school status with respect to student achievement, gifted identification and program enrollment. Attention to gifted department data collection makes it possible to track, reference, and report on these elements. Reporting this data to the various stakeholder groups can help correct the discrepancies. The data can then be used to document trends over the years to recognize patterns and highlight areas that need improvement (Peters & Brulles, 2017).

Influences from stakeholders can impact gifted programming in many ways. This section seeks to answer the questions: What data needs to be collected to strengthen diversity and develop equitable gifted programming? What data does the district already collect that will demonstrate necessary attention to the school's range of gifted students? How can this data be used? Consider these questions from the perspectives of the stakeholder groups noted here: district-level administrators, school principals, gifted coordinators, teachers, parents, and school board members.

## **SET ASIDE**

*Compare your student demographics to your gifted identified student population and use this comparison data to determine if specific populations are underrepresented. Then explore alternative tools and methods for gifted testing that may provide for a more equitable identification procedure. Proactively work to increase the numbers of underrepresented students identified as gifted (Peters & Brulles, 2017).*

## **District-Level Administrators**

School district administrators have access to a considerable amount and range of data. Visually representing the following data through a series of charts can provide compelling evidence to school leaders making decisions on gifted services.

- Reporting on gifted student achievement data at the classroom, school and district level.
- Comparison of achievement data broken into subgroups.
- Examination of how Title I and II funds. (These funds are allowable for the purpose of increasing equity in gifted programs and for training teachers how to identify and serve diverse populations.)

## **School Principals**

School principals are in a unique position to most directly impact which students in the schools participate in gifted services at their sites. This may mean adopting new practices and procedures designed to specifically support those students in the school with the most need. Principals can use the data to group and serve those students, even if they do not formally “identify” as gifted based on the school district criteria. Some schools refer to these students as, “talent pool,” “flexed” (into a program), or as being on a “watch list.” Data and action steps school principals can use includes:

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- Identifying which groups of students are not reflected well in the school.
- Using building level data from gifted testing results to create local norms to determine which students in the school would benefit from the school's gifted services.
- Providing parent engagement seminars along with the gifted coordinator to inform parents about the school's gifted services. (Parents of students from diverse groups are more likely to attend these meetings when they are held at the school site as opposed to at the district level.)
- Learning about nuances in gifted students' characteristics in different cultures and ethnic groups, then sharing this information with staff members to help equip them on recognizing strengths in diverse populations.

### **Gifted Coordinators**

The role of the gifted coordinator varies widely, as do their titles. Some gifted coordinators serve one school only; some serve several students; and some serve the entire district. The data the gifted coordinator collects is determined by the role and the populations served in the position. Regardless of the level and role, the gifted coordinator can share these charts with school principals and district administrators to encourage and guide gifted program modifications (Johnsen, 2013).

- Document achievement data at the school level and the grade level.
- Compare gifted student achievement levels by ethnicity.
- Compare gifted student identification by Title I school status.
- Compare gifted student achievement by Title I school status.

### **Teachers**

Teachers routinely collect a myriad of data they use to inform instruction. Examining the data with the goal of recognizing student strengths within the classroom can have an immediate impact on the students' curriculum and instructional needs. Documenting individual students' needs relative to their strengths demonstrates responsive instruction and can document the need for differentiation, enrichment and acceleration (regardless of whether the student is officially identified as gifted). Sample data include:

- Observations
- Rating scales
- Student reflections
- Student-led conferences
- Student achievement

### **Parents**

Parents hold a unique and potentially powerful position in impacting gifted programs. Parents actively involved in advocacy efforts typically represent majority populations served in the gifted programs. A myriad of reasons why this discrepancy in advocacy occurs, which oftentimes is inherent in how gifted programs are structured. To expand the immediacy of support for gifted programming, parents are

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encouraged to advocate for all gifted learners, relying on and emphasizing data that highlight existing inequities in existing practices.

Methods parents can embrace to assist in expanding gifted services to all demographic groups within the school and district include:

- Using the state mandate to advocate for services that are equitable to all students.
- Using school district data to point out inequities in student identification.
- Using the school district mission statement as evidence of the district's commitment to serve all gifted students.

Advocating for under-represented populations will ultimately lead to the improvement of gifted services for all students.

### **School Board Members**

Many school board members are parents of gifted and talented students. As such, they likely recognize the extreme differences in their gifted childrens' learning needs than their age peers. Considering data from within the school district not only brings to light existing inequities in those who receive services, it also serves as a tool to improve opportunities for gifted students in general. School board members who have this broad understanding, supported by district data, can compel school leaders to pay attention to efforts being proposed to enhance and broaden gifted services. To encourage these efforts:

- Provide school board members with pertinent data selected from the list above.
- Request a board study session to examine the data and make recommendations.
- Use specific student examples from the district to demonstrate need for action.

## **OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM MODELS**

Heightened awareness of inequities in gifted education programs are pressing schools to rethink how they are providing gifted services. Schools have become more adept at identifying diverse populations by using a combination of traditional and nontraditional identification measures, incorporating universal screening, and using local norms. With this shift in gifted identification schools must now consider that the students previously served will change. It is apparent that in many states what has been in place needs to evolve to better serve a more diverse population.

Learners should not have to adapt to the system; gifted education should adapt to the learner.

Removing teacher bias and subjectivity in the nomination and identification process is the first step (Allen, 2017). There are still those who may believe that some of these newly identified students are not as intellectually strong and academically prepared as those identified on traditional measures. This mentality presents a deficit approach that can be addressed by expanding gifted services to become more inclusive in order to invite better representation of the school population.

Typical gifted education models and provisions incorporate various combinations of content acceleration, enrichment, and differentiated curriculum and instruction. These instructional methods are usually provided through inclusion or pull-out models. As noted earlier in regards to serving diverse

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populations, for many historically underrepresented populations of gifted learners, inclusion models work well because students receive modifications and accommodations to curriculum and instruction within the regular classroom or in a self-contained gifted class. In an inclusionary program model, the instructional methods noted here can be implemented in areas in which the students need based on their areas of strength at a given time.

Identifying a program model or models should be determined by the needs of your gifted student population. Building a gifted program based on the needs of your school’s gifted population usually requires some degree of mind shift for teachers and administrators. Although unusual in practice, offering a continuum of services is ideal to address the vast range of gifted students’ learning needs. At varying stages of their education and development, some gifted students need acceleration in some or all content areas, some need enrichment, and some need a combination of both (Peters & Brulles, 2017).

The most common gifted program models used in schools include: self-contained gifted programs, honors classes, cluster grouping and enrichment classes. The chart below points out the benefits and concerns of each of these prevalent gifted program models in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion.

*Table 2. Gifted program models and their impact on DEI*

<b>Program Model</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Concerns</b>
Self-contained Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inclusive in nature</li> <li>● Project based learning typically used in these programs builds on students’ strengths and interests</li> <li>● Full time attention to gifted learning needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Entrance criteria may limit participation</li> <li>● Curriculum may be too radically accelerated for some gifted learners</li> </ul>
Cluster Grouping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inclusive in nature</li> <li>● Classes consist of varied levels of learning needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dependent upon the teachers’ ability to differentiate instruction</li> <li>● Relies on class placements made with fidelity to the model</li> </ul>
Honors classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Allows for acceleration for advanced learners</li> <li>● Promotes depth and complexity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Exclusive in nature</li> <li>● Instruction typically emphasizes accelerated rather than differentiated instruction</li> </ul>
Enrichment classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inclusive in nature</li> <li>● Appeals to students’ interests, critical thinking and creativity</li> <li>● Can be flexible in nature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Instruction usually not connected to core content</li> <li>● Intermittent services limit amount of time students are served</li> </ul>

## **PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS**

Practical solutions for strengthening instruction for diverse gifted learners can be addressed through several common practices in gifted education. These practices include grouping practices, differentiated instruction and building teacher awareness. This section provides an overview into how teachers can reach diverse learners through these practices.

### **Grouping Practices**

Grouping methods take on many forms depending on the students’ needs. A few commonly used for gifted learners include groupings used in the gifted service models discussed in Table X: cluster grouping,

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across grade level grouping (as in many self-contained gifted programs), content replacement grouping and enrichment groups.

Flexible grouping is one method that is particularly important when serving a diverse group of gifted learners. This practice allows students to move between learning groups depending on students':

- levels of achievement in a certain area;
- interests;
- readiness; and
- learning styles

This inherently flexible practice can enfranchise gifted learners who are achieving at different levels and allow them to develop their personal strengths and interests.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

All students can benefit from differentiated instruction. Gifted learners, in particular, need modified curriculum and differentiated instruction due to their advanced learning needs. Considering the range of learning needs, background experiences and cultural practices that diverse student groups bring to any given classroom, one naturally understands the need for differentiated instruction. Importantly, differentiated instruction provides an avenue in which students can access learning based on where they are within the content being taught. Lessons designed by teachers who have an understanding of the complex and diverse learning needs of their students' differentiated instruction can allow students to build on their experiences, backgrounds, cultures and interests.

### **Building Teacher Awareness**

The absence of cultural references to diverse groups in school curricula has been a well documented concern for decades. The lack of a culturally responsive curriculum can feel culturally assaultive to students. It may be construed as intentionally dismissing the students' identity.

Expectations that educators have for their students directly influence students' behavior and achievement. When the school curriculum does not include reference to students' cultures they send the message that this is acceptable. Students then feel that *they* are less valued than are the student groups reflected in the curriculum. This makes them less likely to fully engage in the learning process.

Looking at culturally relevant curriculum promotes racial pride in students. Curriculum that promotes diversity and honors students' cultures demonstrates respect for the students. These efforts greatly increase engagement and can improve understanding of the material being taught. This engagement can then motivate students to challenge themselves at deeper levels. School administrators who oversee professional learning and curriculum development must build teacher awareness to the need and provide resources to allow this to occur.

## **CONCLUSION**

To celebrate diversity and respect for all cultures and races educators must nurture equality and inclusion within the classroom and by extension, within gifted programs. Schools can honor,

build upon, and connect with the cultures of gifted students by ensuring that equitable identification procedures are used to identify students for gifted education programs so that they become inclusive of diverse populations and that curricular materials reflect diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives (Brulles, et al., 2010).

These acknowledgments of diversity validate the students for who they are and from whence they came. These efforts also strengthen students' social, emotional, and academic development; they instill a sense of pride and encourage empowerment by making sure their "cultural voice" is part of their gifted education experience (Grissom, Rodriguez, Kern, 2017). Schools must actively plan for ways to provide these students with the most appropriate education based on their distinctive needs. With schools more attuned at identifying the learning potential of historically underserved populations, they are better able to enfranchise and plan for their continued academic success.

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## **ENDNOTE**

- <sup>1</sup> When local norms are used, each student is compared to students in the same grade, school or school district instead of a national sample of students. This approach provides a comparison to a group that more precisely represents the community in which students live rather than the country in which students reside. “Local norms are often useful in conjunction with published norms, especially if the local population differs markedly from the population on which published national norms were based. In some cases, local norms may be used exclusively” (AERA, APA, NCME, 2014; p. 196). See Chapter 5 for more discussion regarding local and national norms.