

Global Diversity Issues and Socio-Cultural Perspectives in the Education of Special Populations of Gifted Students

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Giftedness is defined by every context and culture in a diverse way. Each country chooses its own definition, that gives rise to ways of identifying gifted students, planning educational placement and programs for gifted students and choices about differentiation and curriculum choice for gifted students. When students are minorities, they encounter dominant perspectives of the prevailing culture, where their own ethnic perspectives may not only be excluded but may stress diverse skills, abilities and talents as well.

This is also complicated by students that have a religion that is not that of the majority. Students who immigrate to another country then have to face multiple challenges. Geographical facts also come into play, such as with gifted students who come from rural communities, whose perspectives may be different from urban or suburban students for whom the gifted program has been developed.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Today, the World Wide Web and the newer broadcasting technologies are available to all but developing and third world countries making the world smaller and much more intimate. In recent months, people around the world have had front seats to the war in Iraq. Nevertheless, the war really is a world event even although it did not directly impact everyone in the world to the same degree. This single event highlights the notion of a global society. Droughts in Africa, floods in Indonesia, earthquakes in Algeria, terrorist attacks in the U.S. and other countries now have global impact. The issues are social, economical and humanitarian. So how does this “new” global perspective affect the teaching of gifted students? First, the gifted students must be, as should all students, “empowered to participate actively as global citizens.” (Brown and Kysilka, 2002, p. 16). That means that teachers need to help students to develop interconnectedness and interdependence, practice co-responsibility and experience the global society.

Interconnectedness and Interdependence

In the classroom students can examine issues they confront everyday to find implications for global understanding. For example, students can be asked to examine the labels in the clothes that they wear. The outside label may be that of the newest trendy company (Nike, Gap, Izod, Disney, Levi) and the icon of that company is very visible. However, the inside label might indicate that the garment was assembled in Mexico or Sri Lanka or made in China or Japan. Students may

explore the Internet to see where American companies have corporate offices and manufacturing plants in the world. There is a stretch of highway, for example, in Monterrey, Mexico that has plant after plant with names such as Kodak, Kimberly-Clark, General Electric and other “American” companies plastered on the buildings. Questions could be explored as to why American companies locate plants outside the U.S. borders or have products assembled outside the country. Students could develop a better understanding of economic concepts such as supply and demand and profit margins by studying these phenomena. Students could also study how weather conditions in South America affect the prices of food in the U.S. By examining such issues, students will develop a much better perspective of the interconnectedness and interdependence of world societies.

Co-responsibility

Issues of discrimination, whether respect to race, gender, age, social class or culture are very complex and lie deep in the belief systems of individuals and institutions. To reform these deep-seated beliefs and the injustices carried out, as a result of the beliefs requires major social/political reform. This reform needs to start with the teacher in the classrooms. Belief systems, injustices perpetuated by the systems, and alternative courses of action to the treatment of those persons who are different need to become foci for study in our public schools. Teachers who believe they, because they have no “diverse” students in their classrooms, are immune from dealing with these issues are abdicating their responsibility for building a democratic and socially just society. White teachers and the white children they teach need to understand their position of “privilege” and need to understand the challenges faced by those who are less privileged because of race, class, sexual orientation, handicapping condition or other characteristics of a multicultural society. All persons who aspire to teach are part of the solution to the multicultural/global divide that exists in the U.S. Some areas of the country are more accepting of difference than others, but all must work toward a solution of understanding and accepting differences. As teachers become more knowledgeable about multicultural and global perspectives they are in positions to lead and influence the children they teach and the parents of those children. Most people simply need help to understand the changing complexion and culture of American society. Thus teachers can become agents of change by creating a learning environment where students recognize their future roles in building and sustaining a strong democratic country.

Experiencing the Global Society

As indicated in the section on interconnectedness and interdependence, it is fairly easy to bring the world into the classroom; it is much more difficult to move the students into the richness of the world they will live in after they leave the protection and safety of their schools. Thus, teachers have a responsibility to create an “action-oriented” classroom. The phrase “think globally, act locally” is a mantra teachers can use to help student learn how to become positive activists. Gifted students, because of their innate higher order thinking abilities, inquisitiveness, and problem solving skills are excellent candidates to become action-oriented members of society.

GEOGRAPHICAL/REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

So often, students in our schools are relatively myopic about the society in which they live. Depending upon their social class or their parents' employment, many students' experiences outside their immediate community are limited to visits to family members or "favorite haunts" of their parents.

In Florida, the population is considerably more mobile than other parts of the country, so many of the students in gifted classrooms may have vast experiences in living in or visiting other parts of the country or world. Likewise, there may be students in classrooms who have never been outside of Florida, never saw snow or mountains, and might not have even been to the beach. Some student may have never been to a farm or ranch, while others may not have visited a large city. Limited experiences create limited viewpoints.

Part of a teacher's responsibility is to help the students understand how people in different regions of our country have different kinds of experiences and thus different perspectives on social, political, or economic issues. In order for teachers to effectively communicate with the gifted students, they need to understand the regional backgrounds of the students and how the students' thinking may have been influenced by those backgrounds. Also, teachers need to help students to understand the diversity of ideas based upon a person's regional background. Preservation of the beaches in Florida may be just as an important environmental issue as the preservation of the forests in the Pacific Northwest. Learning Spanish in Florida may be as useful as learning Chinese in California or German in Pennsylvania or Polish in Chicago.

There are numerous activities teachers can design to help students understand the regional differences within our country, from language to arts to food to customs to sports to life style. Teachers can use students as resources, as well as the Internet, videos, or literature. Teachers may find rich resources within the community. An important consideration for teachers is to capitalize on the regional differences that may exist in the classroom and build a sense of community as the students learn about the patchwork quilt of ideas, experience, customs, and practices that make up America.

Rural Perspectives

Rural children are frequently overlooked for gifted programs (if those programs even exist). Many rural students may have "selected" abilities rather than "general" abilities, which are the ones teachers usually notice first. For example, rural students may have great skills in preparing for and presenting 4 H competitions on raising an animal or preventing destruction of crops from predators, or quilting, or canning. Thus, teachers may not recommend students to be screened for gifted programs. Second, in many rural schools, no provisions are made for gifted students (or other special needs children). The reasons for lack of service deal with the number of

students who could benefit from the services and the cost of the services. Third, in some rural communities, the programs offered for these students require bussing to more distant or consolidated schools and parents are reluctant to have their children participate in the bussing. Parents believe that the bussing is too time consuming when “measured” against the benefits.

The Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development is located at the University of Iowa and in 1999 they published *Gifted Education in Rural Schools: A National Assessment*. In their report they identified nine challenges faced by educators working with gifted students in rural communities:

1. Lack of community resources, such as museums, libraries, or professional mentors.
2. Lack of numbers to develop a strong peer group.
3. Lack of time for students to become involved in additional programs, such as enrichment at community colleges.
4. Lack of Advanced Placement classes or enrichment classes.
5. Lack of training for teachers and administrators on gifted education issues.
6. Difficulties in hiring qualified teachers, especially those with advanced training and experience.
7. Limited curricula due to small populations.
8. Accusations of “elitism” by community members.
9. A sense of isolation for teachers trying to develop new/unique programs to serve gifted/talented students.

According to the 1999 Digest of Education Statistics, nearly one fifth of the total U.S. population was 5- to 17-year-olds, and nearly 18 percent of those students in 1998 lived in poverty. The poverty was found in all 50 states and many children of poverty resided in rural areas or small towns. Fifty percent of all public schools are in rural areas or small town. Thirty-nine percent of all public school students, nearly 17.5 million, live in rural communities (Colangelo, N., Assouline, S., New, J., 2001). Other factors which have negatively impacted rural, gifted students have been: The consolidation of schools which frequently thwarted efforts of dynamic teachers designing special enrichment programs for the students in these communities; the standardization movement focusing on equalizing educational opportunities for all students which led to the notion that gifted students will make it on their own and did not need special programs; and the latest emphasis—the state standards movement. This movement focuses attention on the lowest common denominator in the school (the underachieving student) and demands an inordinate amount of teachers’ attention on that group of students at the expense of the more able youngsters. Many schools, particularly in small towns and rural area have no choice but to eliminate electives, honors programs, enrichment or advanced classes in order to attend to the remediation of the less academically able student.

RELIGIOUS PERCEPTIONS

Very little has been written about how religious beliefs affect the lives of children in a multicultural environment. Perhaps one reason for the lack of this attention is the oft-misunderstood concept of “separation of church and State.” Nowhere in our Constitution or the Bill of Rights, or our Federal or State statutes are schools forbidden to study “religion.” Schools simply cannot adopt a single religious belief system that is promoted in the curriculum. In the past, no particular sect was ever promoted in our public schools, but there is no doubt that the Christian religion impacted much of what was learned in school and influenced the school schedules. Until recently, neither the curriculum nor the school calendar were major concerns of the parents or the students in our public schools. However, as our population has become more ethnically diverse, it has also become more religiously diverse. Consequently, it is imperative that teachers become sensitive to these religious differences and adjust their teaching accordingly.

Some obvious curricular decisions revolve around the study of “holidays.” Valentines Day, Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas are all “Christian” celebrations and public school classrooms are frequently decorated reflecting these holidays. Even when teachers use more secular decorations than religious ones, the reality is still there of recognizing Christian holidays.

In order for schools to be sensitive to different beliefs, the curriculum, explicit or hidden, need not remove what is being done, but should include references to celebrations observed in other non-Christian religions. By including information on celebrations such as Hanukkah, Ramadan, Chinese New Year, Kwanzaa and other cultural/religious practices of various ethnic groups can serve as a great learning activity leading to understanding and tolerance of different religious belief systems. School calendars revolve around Christian holidays. Spring break is usually scheduled before or after Easter. Winter break always occurs during Christmas. Thus Christian children rarely miss school because of religious holidays. This is not true of other religious groups. For many years, Jewish children could never earn “perfect attendance” at school if they stayed home to celebrate their most holy of holidays. Many school districts now recognize the inappropriateness of that “penalty” have policies that excuse students from school because of religious beliefs and allow these students to earn recognition of “perfect attendance.”

Teachers and administrators must also understand religious practices that might influence how students behave or perform in school. Most people understand sacrifices some Christians make during Lent. Yet many do not know much about the daily fasting of Muslims during Ramadan. Fasting means no food or drink from sun-up to sunset for the entire month of Ramadan. Such sacrifice can easily create learning and attention problems for many Muslim children. Some religions, particularly in their most fundamental forms, require daily prayer, sometimes as many as five times a day. Schools should be able to provide opportunities for

students to practice their belief by having a “space” where students can go to for prayer. Students may have dietary restrictions related to religious beliefs. School menus can usually accommodate such restrictions and if there are “special” celebrations in the school or classroom that involve food, teachers/administrators must ensure that all students can participate in the activities and not be restricted because of lack of appropriate food choices. In gifted classrooms, religious differences provide an excellent opportunity for students to share their beliefs, to find similarities and differences in belief system. Usually when such activities occur, students discover that most basic tenets of different religions support similar values such as honesty, integrity, love of family, and respect of parents and elders.

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

The impact of culture on gifted students’ understanding of self and their relationships with peers and teachers cannot be underestimated. Culture is a very powerful influence on how students think and act. According to Ford and Harris III (1999, p. 3), if we selected 100 people from the Earth’s population who represented the ratios of all human characteristics, the sample would consist of 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere (North and South), and 8 Africans. Fifty-one of the group would be female and 49 male. Seventy would be non-white, while 30 would be white. Only 30 would be Christian and 70 would be non-Christian, and half of the world’s wealth would be in the hands of 6 people. This image is very different than what we see in many of our classrooms and it certainly is not what we find in our gifted classes. It is imperative for educators to understand these differences and how the cultures of these groups of people impact students’ perceptions as to their roles as students in our public schools.

Immigrant Perspectives

Those of us who have worked with gifted students are well aware of the social/emotional challenges many of these students face, particularly those students who are “different” than the Anglo-American student. However, immigrant students face additional problems. These problems fall into several categories (Harris, C.R., 1993).

- **Linguistic.** Most immigrant students are non-English or limited English speakers. Their lack of English language skills frequently affects an accurate assessment of their intellectual potential and the students are often placed in lower level academic subjects because of their language skills rather than their academic abilities determining proper placement in classes.
- **Cultural.** Traditions, customs, sex-role behaviors of many of the immigrant students may be very different than those found in many U.S. schools. Learning styles, classroom behavior, and attitudes toward authority may also be different and the immigrant students may find it difficult to adjust to a “typical” American classroom.
- **Economic.** The recent influx of immigrants to the U.S. is less wealthy than

many of the former immigrants into the U.S. Many of the immigrants are coming from war-torn countries, are political refugees, and try to maintain relations with family members back in their native country. Thus their financial resources are strained and because of language problems or lack of ability to document their skills and/or education, immigrants may be working at minimum wage, menial jobs very different from those they may have held in their native country. Illegal immigrant status also contributes to problems faced by many immigrant families. Because of their illegal status, fear and lack of knowledge about accessing social and health services impede their educational progress.

- **Attitude.** Although many immigrant students may have very positive attitudes about education, they may be overwhelmed by the stress of their migration experiences and their attempts at acculturation and worried about “who was left behind”. These factors may affect them to such a degree that they are emotionally drained and have little energy to devote to their school work. Also, immigrant children may have been separated from parents, siblings or extended family members in their journey to the states, thus they may feel lonely and isolated and fearful of developing relationships with peers or adults, because those relationships may be short-termed.
- **Sociocultural/Peer Expectations.** Living in a new environment with, perhaps, much more diversity than the immigrant student had experienced before, may contribute to the students’ perceptions of conflicting ideologies about his/her ability to succeed. The cross-cultural challenges may be extremely confusing to the immigrant student and may negatively impact the development of self-identity in the new environment.
- **Intergenerational.** Often, the immigrant child becomes the “interpreter: for the family. He/she may learn English and customs faster than the older members of the household, thus, the role reversal of the “younger guiding the older,” may create negative family relationships and is contradictory to accepted practice in the native culture.
- **Schooling.** Of recent immigrants, many have had little opportunity for schooling or have had their education disrupted because of internal conflicts within their native countries. When children emigrate to the U.S., they may arrive with little documentation of their previous school experiences, making placement in our schools difficult. If students did emigrate with all documents and were in regular attendance in their schools, they may still have adjustment problems in American schools. Our schools are very different than most schools in other countries, particularly from intermediate elementary grades through high school. The organization of our classrooms, our methods of teaching, and the way we assess students are all “new” experiences for the immigrant. Adjustment may be difficult and slow.

Immigrant children can be easily marginalized in our schools. If they are gifted or potentially gifted, lack of attention to their needs can easily affect the way these students cope in school. Often they may make social, peer group choices that may not be the best academic choices for them, but provide feelings of belonging, so important to their self-identity and self-esteem. Curricular and instructional accommodations can be achieved through careful planning which is sensitive to the diversities in existence in the classroom. If students have language problems, instruction should be multi-modal to ensure that some connectivity can take place for the limited English proficient (LEP) child.

If there are immigrant children in the classroom, teachers need to accommodate their sense of loss and confusion. Allowing and encouraging these children to share their experiences through discussion, story telling, pictures, dramatizations or written reports will help the children to assimilate. An important concept for teachers to remember when working with recent immigrant children is that these children initially engage in a “period of silence,” observing and listening. This “period of silence” is a safe-haven for them as they try to make sense out of what is a very confusing time. Teachers and classmates must be patient; they must be kind and caring, and certainly empathetic to the immigrant child whose life experiences may have been highly traumatic. Christina Igoa (1995) indicates that to effectively teach the immigrant child in the classroom, teachers need to follow the CAP Model (Cultural/Academic/Psychological) of intervention in order to facilitate their learning. The model is designed to facilitate the child’s connection to his/her native culture and academic achievement while providing his/her with a classroom environment in which he/she can thrive. No small task.

African American Gifted Students

There is no question that African American gifted students are underrepresented in the gifted classrooms throughout the United States. The question is why does this underrepresentation exist and persist? Dozens of researchers, over the years, have tried to answer this question, and the results of their research can be summarized by the statements below (Dickson, 2003).

- Being gifted and African American is an anomaly
- Lack of a clear definition of giftedness from a multicultural perspective
- Negative racial attitudes
- Eurocentric perspectives on what is taught
- Overreliance on standard assessment strategies, ignoring special talents and abilities of multicultural populations
- Failure to include African American culture as part of the curriculum
- Misalignment of gifted programs and general education environments
- Poor identification strategies
- Failure to involve parents and guardians in the identification process
- Inadequately trained teachers working in multicultural settings
- Lack of role models
- Low expectations for academic performance

Added to these findings can be the lack of knowledge as to the learning styles of African American students. Research on the learning styles of African American students indicates that they are field-dependent, field-sensitive, holistic, relational and visual learners. (Daniels, 2002). They prefer group to individual learning activities, cooperative to competitive environments, are influenced by external cues when formulating opinions and viewpoints. They desire feedback and approval of others, prefer tactile and kinesthetic learning and are people oriented. They are highly sensitive to praise and criticism (Daniels, 2002). Although most of the research on learning styles of African American students was not done exclusively with identified gifted students, there is reason to believe that the characteristics from this research can also be applied to identified African American gifted students and should be used in the process of identifying students for gifted programs.

There are no cookbook approaches to designing instruction programs for African American gifted students (as there are none for any students); there are some strategies that teachers can employ to cultivate the abilities of these students.

- Match instructional strategies to students' learning styles.
- Infuse African American cultural concepts, whenever possible, into the curriculum.
- Develop active learning environments, focus on high interest materials, and de-emphasize repetitive skills development.
- Start new ideas globally, using visual, emphasizing relevant concepts, providing concrete examples.
- Allow students to work in groups.
- Maintain high expectations.
- Provide frequent feedback; use affective responses to encourage and motivate students.
- Teach various ways of learning and knowing to help students learn how to access, manipulate, store, and retrieve information; use multiple strategies and activities to help students learn how to respond to a variety of communication styles, cognitive skills, and assessment strategies.
- Address students' social, emotional, and psychological needs as well as their academic needs. (Daniels, 2002)

One of the major concerns in working with African American students is their lack of role models. As teachers plan and design curriculum, they need to include in their programs material reflective of the high achievements of African Americans. The examples need to be broadly representative and not limited to the "obvious," e.g., music idols and athletes. Currently, students have many role models to study from Colin Powell to Barbara Jordan and Shirley Chisholm; from Oprah Winfrey to Denzel Washington or Morgan Freeman; from Maya Angelou to Toni Morrison. Helping students to see achievements of African Americans can go a long way to help them improve their self-concept and set achievable goals for their future.

Hispanic Gifted Students

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 16.8% of the population in Florida was reported as Hispanic or Latino. The Hispanic population in PK-12 schools was 20.2% and represented the largest numeric increase in enrollment in the schools than any other ethnic group. There were slightly over 500,000 students in the PK-12 programs in Florida during 2001–2002. Of those students, 61.6% were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Thus, one obvious characteristic of the Florida Hispanic population is that the majority can be classified as poor. Hispanics now constitute the largest ethnic, non-white, population in the state. African Americans constitute 14.6% of the population, and white, non-Hispanic equals 65.4% of the population. In the PK-12 schools, African Americans account for 24.5% of the population and white, non-Hispanics make up 51.2% of the population (FLDOE, Florida Quick Facts). Only California, Texas and New York have larger Hispanic populations than Florida.

“Hispanics have a broad range of language and cultural characteristics and needs that impact on their academic and cognitive development.” (Reyes-Carrasquillo, 2000, p.6). Although the Spanish Language, religious beliefs (mainly Catholic) and strong family structures are characteristic of most Hispanics, experiences and backgrounds may be quite different. In Florida, “Hispanic” is an umbrella term that covers immigrants (1st, 2nd, & 3rd generations) from countries such as Mexico, Cuba, Columbia, Venezuela, Spain, Dominican Republic, Chile, Costa Rico, Granada, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Argentina. Students in our schools are also from Puerto Rico, where they are American citizens, and New Ricans (Puerto Ricans who move to Florida from New York). We also have a large population of Brazilians and Portuguese, who are frequently and erroneously are called Hispanic. Because the experiences of these groups are vastly different from each other, it is imperative that we do not over-generalize about Hispanic students—they are the same, but they are different, much like whites are the same, but they are different.

Educational data on Hispanics is not very encouraging. Most Hispanics are considered at-risk of not being successful in American public schools. Data consistently reflects low achievement, high drop out rates, poor school attendance, large placement in exceptional education classes, disproportional enrollment in remediation and underrepresentation in advanced or gifted classes. In 1993, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s report entitled, “The Conditions of Education in the Nation,” over twice as many (36%) Hispanics dropped out of school when compared to blacks (17%). Only 59% of Hispanics ages 20–24 had high school diplomas and only 30% of the 25–29 year olds attended college and only 8% graduated with a bachelor’s degree (Baldwin & Vialle, 1999). Part of the school problem is that most Hispanics are bilingual, with strong ties to their native language. For young children, bilingualism is often seen as a plus, but for older children, trying to learn in English, while often speaking only Spanish at home or in their community can be daunting and frustrating to the student. Not only are the students expect to perform in the dominant English environment of school, they are also expected to do well on the various assessment tests that provide little accommodation for their

bilingualism. Children who emigrate to the U.S. during their teen years may find it extremely difficult to learn English sufficiently well to pass the mandated state tests. Many adults struggle with learning a second language and people applaud their efforts, yet we expect the young adolescent and his/her older brothers or sisters to master the language quickly so they can “learn” in school.

Besides bilingualism, there are other factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of Hispanics in gifted programs.

- Stereotyping of Hispanics as lazy and unable
- Ethnic prejudice
- Low expectations
- Inaccurate screening
- Lack of appreciation of Hispanic talents
- Bias in testing
- Exclusion of parental collaboration in identifying skills and talents
- Lack of trained teachers to work with Hispanic students
- Hispanics enrolled in dominantly poor schools where learning environments are not conducive to learning and the staff is not as concerned about identifying gifted/talented students.
- Unresponsiveness and inflexibility of schools to meet the needs of Hispanic students (Baldwin & Vialle, 1999)

As with other cultures, Hispanic students maintain different styles of learning. Teachers need to recognize these differences and try to accommodate them in the classroom. Hispanic students prefer:

- Real-world learning experiences
- Active learning
- Social/collaborative learning
- Student-centered classrooms
- Concrete learning/thinking
- Present-time orientation
- Authority figures to solve problems
- To avoid eye contact while listening or following directions

Teachers who are working with Hispanic gifted students need to understand the complexity of their lives, the conflicts between their heritage and the practices of American schools, and as with the African Americans, their need to find relevance in what they are learning as it interacts with their culture. Teachers simply need to be sensitive to the needs of the students and accommodate them by using a variety of strategies and techniques that are inclusive of those preferred by these students, and to make appropriate curriculum adjustments to help the students master the required content.

Native American Gifted

Although the Native American population is growing, the growth is small compared to the growth in Hispanic, African American, Asian Pacific and Middle Eastern groups in the United States. According to the 2000 U.S. Census report, in Florida, only .3% of the population is classified as Native American, which nearly equates to the percentage (.28%) of Native American enrolled in our schools. In 2001–2002, there were 6893 PK–12 students in school who were classified as Native Americans, and 42% of them qualified for free or reduced lunch (FLDOE, Florida Quick Facts). As in other parts of the country, many of Florida's Native Americans live on a reservation in south-central Florida, while the remainder are scattered in the urban/suburban communities around the state. Because a large proportion (67%) of Native American/ Native Alaskan people live in urban areas (mostly west of the Mississippi), gathering statistics on this group and the gifted within this group has been difficult.

According to the 1990 Census, the largest Native American groups were the Cherokee, the Navajo and the Sioux. There are 328 federally recognized tribes in the United States. (Foley & Skenandore, 2003). Each of these tribes or nations developed their own languages and cultural identities, making them a complex group to understand and to generalize about. Much of their beliefs, traditions, customs, were passed from generation to generation orally, rather than in written form—again making it difficult to find resources by which to study these groups of individuals. Although there are 185 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools scattered throughout the United States, 90% of the Native Americans attend public PK–12 schools.

Gifted programs at BIA schools were initially established in 1988, but they were not well supported until 1994 when the Jacob Javits Gifted Talented Education Program was established to target underrepresented minorities in gifted and talented programs. Two projects out of that funding, Project Spring and Project Discovery targeted Native Americans in the New Mexico (Mescalero Apache Tribe) and Arizona (rural and urban Navajo) (Spicker, 1995).

Characteristics and learning styles of Native American learners include:

- High verbal ability
- Advanced story telling skills
- Keen powers of observation
- Wide range of interests
- Highly developed sense of humor
- Willingness to take risks
- Being a holistic learner
- Preference for group collaboration over individual competition
- Valuing memorization as a mode of learning
- Valuing modeling as a mode of instruction
- Learning from mistakes
- Preference for auditory and visual learning

Native Americans are also not materialistic, not language dependent, not facially expressive, not spontaneous, and are non-assertive (Foley & Skenandore, 2003).

Native Americans have strong family/tribal orientations. They are extremely respectful of elders and adult authority. They are very spiritual and most tribes recognize a “Great Spirit” who guides and protects them. Approximately 25% of Native Americans will enter school speaking little English; thus early identification of potential giftedness may be hampered by the student’s lack of verbal ability in English. Teachers of gifted Native American students should:

1. Present appropriate Native American role models with which the students can identify.
2. Avoid “marginalization” by studying only the arts/crafts aspects of Native American lives. There is much more significant content to be explored in Native American culture.
3. Accurately depict the history of Native Americans.
4. Recognize the differences in various tribal groups.
5. Integrate the history of Native Americans into the regular U.S. history course. Likewise, incorporate Native American literature in language arts classes.
6. Use materials that show respect for and understanding of the complexities of Native societies.
7. Use primary sources that emphasize the oral language traditions of Native societies.
8. Emphasize the role women and children play in Native societies.
9. Discuss ideas and issues in present terms, not past tense.

Because school culture and home culture for Native American students can be very different and value different traits, it is imperative that teachers provide emotional support and encouragement for the Native American students enrolled in gifted classes. Teachers may also find it necessary to work collaboratively with parents and family members to help them understand the nature of the gifted programs. And, since many Native Americans live in poverty, it is important for teachers to understand both the cultural and economic constraints faced by the Native American gifted child.

Asian Pacific Gifted Students

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are less than 2% Asian Pacific persons residing in Florida, which equates with the percentage of Asian Pacific (1.92%) students (48,027) enrolled in PK-12 programs in the public schools. Although the number of Asian Pacific students is small compared to other minority groups, these children constitute large numbers of students enrolled in gifted classes. Almost 20% of Asian Pacific students qualify for gifted programs, a percentage much higher than whites (9%), African American (7.9%), Hispanics (6.7%) or Native Americans (2.1%) (Castellano, 2003).

Like other ethnic groups, there is no single Asian Pacific ethnic group. The Asian Pacific population is comprised of people from a variety of countries: Cambodia, China, Korea, Japan, India, Laos, Philippines, Taiwan, Samoa/Tonga/Guam, Thailand and Vietnam. The largest Asian Pacific population is found on the West Coast; however, the largest Chinese community in the United States is Chinatown in New York City. Each group that makes up the Asian Pacific classification has its own culture, language, art, religion, traditions, customs and life styles. They have diverse educational, cultural, occupational and economic backgrounds. Asian Pacific peoples tend to cluster in groups within the larger American society, thus preserving much of their language, customs and traditions.

Asian Pacific children are usually raised within rigid, disciplined homes, where parents and elders are honored and education is perceived as essential. Parents take an active interest in their children's education and spend time with their children on school and at home. Thus, Asian Pacific children generally excel in school, do well on tests, and set high goals for themselves. No wonder they are over rather than underrepresented in gifted classes. Asian Pacific children are less verbal than most other children. They are reluctant to share ideas and opinions and would rarely question or challenge a teacher. These students prefer structured, passive learning and perform well in rote memorization activities. Creative writing, on the other hand, is difficult for them (Reyes-Carrasquillo, 2000). Most Asian Pacific students are multilingual, are quick to conform, are in harmony with nature and have a strong work ethic. Because Asian Pacific students generally do well in our schools and are regularly identified for gifted programs, there is little research on or attention given to the unique needs of these students. They are often used as examples as to how students in a minority ethnic group can succeed in school.

However, it must be noted that success in school deteriorates generationally, i.e., Asian Pacific students who are third, or fourth generation American are not as successful in school as newer immigrants who are still highly influenced by parental customs, traditions and beliefs. Although many Asian Pacific people have managerial and technical jobs, Chinese are frequently found in menial service, low skilled and blue-collar jobs. Thirty-one percent of Asian Pacific students in Florida qualify for free and reduced lunch according to the 2000 Census report. Thus poverty may be an influencing factor contributing to the change in achievement among generational Asian Pacific students.

Haitian Gifted Students

According to Jaime Castellano (2003), Haitian Creole is the second most often spoken language in the ESOL classes in South Florida. The Haitian population has increase dramatically in the past 10 years, and most Haitians emigrating to the U.S. arrive illiterate, as educational opportunities in many parts of their country are simply not available to them. In the recent 2000 Census data, Florida does not address Haitians as a separate category in reporting statistics on race and ethnicity. An assumption can be made that the Haitian students are classified, perhaps, in the

multiracial category. This group accounts for 1.7% of the total PK–12 enrollment in our schools, slightly less than the Asian Pacific category. Of this group 43.8% qualify for free and reduced lunch programs. Thus, poverty may be a major contributing factor to the plight of these students. Since the children and many of their parents are illiterate, not just in English, but in their native language, job opportunities are minimal and most work is menial. Thus, students are confronted with multiple challenges: lack of previous schooling; poverty; illiteracy; second language learning and cultural differences. It is no wonder that teachers are highly challenged to work with these students and have difficulty finding ways to identify potentially gifted students in the Haitian population.

In 1998, Palm Beach County, Florida, sponsored a town meeting with the Haitian community to gather data, which would help the district understand the Haitian students. Members of this committee determined several characteristics of giftedness:

- Ability to problem solve
- Ability to code switch (translate language at high levels of accuracy)
- Highly motivated
- Easily adjusts to changing environments
- Ability to learn quickly
- Curious and inquisitive
- Strong memorization skills
- Ability to multi-task
- Potential for leadership (Castellano, 2003).

Other characteristics the Haitian community revealed about their culture included:

- Strong communication skills
- Others' problems are taken personally
- Touching is a sign of affection
- Direct eye contact between an adult and child is a sign of defiance
- Children often assume the adult roles for parents in interactions within the community
- High respect for teachers
- Children often assume responsibility for younger siblings
- Children can be "Americans" in school, Haitian at home
- Members can function equally well individually or in small groups (Castellano, 2003, p. 72).

As with other ethnic groups, the curriculum needs to be culturally relevant and sensitively address the attitudes and values of the culture. Students need to have ethnically appropriate role models, have to engage with materials that will improve students' self-concept, must have opportunities in a safe environment to develop skills that will help them succeed in a competitive environment.

Other Ethnic Groups Who Are Gifted

The previous groups described are those who have a major presence in our schools. However, Florida has become a haven for many other ethnic immigrants. Arab populations are growing, with many of the Middle East immigrants arriving from war torn and repressive countries. Within the Muslim population, many different ethnic groups are represented: Ethiopian, Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, Egyptian, Turks, Palestinian, Pakistani, and others. The economic status of many of these groups ranges from poor to rather wealthy. In addition to the increase in these groups, Florida has become a magnet for immigrants from Russia and the former Soviet Union states. All of these groups bring with them some of the same issues previously discussed with other populations: language problems, cultural differences, different learning styles, different expectations and attitudes, different perceptions of school, different ways of socializing or interacting with peers and adults. As previously suggested, the best way to be effective educators is to respect, honor, understand the ethnic differences and plan lessons that are sensitive to the differences.

Multicultural Gifted Students

Throughout the United States there are increasing groups of gifted students who may not identify themselves with any one ethnic group. They may have parents who come from two diverse ethnic groups, or be in families that are blended with multiple ethnicities and diverse religions. Their skills, abilities and talents have incorporated these multiple perspectives. Their experiences need to be valued as an asset in understanding intercultural communication and incorporated into planning for the gifted curriculum. As creative and thoughtful teachers, making curricular and instructional accommodations for students should not be problematic. Working with special populations is all about good teaching practice.

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