

# *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Gifted Education: Recruitment and Retention Issues*

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**ABSTRACT:** *The field of gifted education has faced criticism about the underrepresentation of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) in its programs. This article proposes that efforts targeting both recruitment and retention barriers are essential to remedying this disparity. Educators' deficit thinking about CLD students underlies both areas (recruitment and retention) and contributes to underrepresentation in significant, meaningful ways. The authors examine factors hindering the recruitment and retention of CLD students in gifted education, attending in particular to definitions and theories, testing, and referral issues, and offer recommendations for improving the representation of CLD students in gifted education.*

A persistent dilemma at all levels of education is the underrepresentation of African American, American Indian, and Hispanic/Latino students in gifted education and advanced placement (AP) classes. Research on the topic of underrepresentation has tended to focus on African American students, starting with Jenkins's (1936) study, which found that despite high intelligence test scores African American students were not formally identified as gifted. For over 70 years, then,

educators have been concerned about the paucity of Black students being identified as gifted. During this timeframe, little progress has been made in reversing underrepresentation. This lack of progress may be due in part to the scant database on gifted students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). In 1998, Ford reviewed trends in reports on underrepresentation spanning 2 decades and found that African American, Hispanic/Latino American, and American Indian students have *always* been underrepresented in gifted education, with underrepresentation



increasing over the years for African American students. (Unlike African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students, Asian American students are well represented in gifted education and AP classes. For example, as of 2002, Asian American students represented 4.42% of students in U.S. schools but 7.64% of those in gifted education; see Table 1). Regardless of the formula used to calculate underrepresentation (see Skiba et al., 2008), the aforementioned three groups of CLD students are always underrepresented, and the percentage of underrepresentation is always greater than 40%. Also, as noted by Ford (1998), less than 2% of publications at that time focused on CLD gifted groups, resulting in a limited pool of theories and studies from which to draw.

The most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR; see Table 1) indicate that as of 2002, African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students remain poorly represented in gifted education, especially CLD males. Further, CLD students seldom enroll in AP classes (The College Board, 2002), the main venue for gifted education at the high school level. In both programs, underrepresentation is at least 50%—well beyond statistical chance and above OCR's 20% discrepancy formula stipulation (Ford & Frazier-Trotman, 2000). Several OCR *Annual Reports to Congress* (2000, 2004, 2005) and publications by Karnes, Troxclair, and Marquardt (1997) and Marquardt and Karnes (1994) indicated that discrimination against CLD students continues in school settings and in gifted education. Karnes et al. examined 38 complaints or letters of findings in gifted education, falling into four categories: (a) admission to gifted programs; (b) identification of gifted students; (c) placement in gifted programs; and (d) procedures involving notification, communication and testing of gifted students. Of these 38 complaints or letters, almost half ( $n = 17$ ) pertained to discrimination against CLD students. Likewise, Marquardt and Karnes reported that most of the 48 letters of findings they reviewed related to discrimination against CLD students, mainly involving lack of access to gifted programs. They concluded that "unless a school district is constantly vigilant in monitoring its procedures for minority students identification

and admission to gifted programs, minorities report underrepresentation" (p. 164).

Compared to special education, gifted education is a small field; fewer publications are devoted to this area of study. And unlike special education, gifted education is not federally mandated, leaving much room for differences in definitions, identification, and programming across districts and states. Only 6 states fully mandate gifted education, and 10 states have neither funding nor a mandate (Davidson Institute, 2006). Proponents of gifted education argue that gifted students have exceptional or special needs, as do children in special education classes; without appropriate services, gifts and talents may be lost or not fully developed. Accordingly, the Javits Act of 1994 recognized this potential loss of talent, specifically among economically disadvantaged and CLD students. The major goal of the Javits Act is to support efforts to identify and serve CLD students and low socioeconomic status (SES) students.

This article first focuses on recruitment and retention issues (acknowledging that most of the scholarship has concentrated on recruitment) and then offers specific recommendations to guide educators in eliminating barriers and opening doors to gifted education for CLD students. We examine the education literature regarding the various conditions that hinder the representation of CLD students in gifted programs nationally, relying heavily on publications and studies that address the impact of perceptions on behavior, such as teacher expectancy theory and student achievement and outcomes (Merton, 1948; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). We suggest that deficit thinking and the use of traditional tests (especially IQ tests) and lack of teacher referral of CLD students for gifted education screening and placement are the primary contributing factors to underrepresentation. In the process of reviewing the literature, we attend to the larger question of the impact of testing instruments and policies and procedures (particularly teacher referrals) on underrepresentation. Further, we consider what school personnel (teachers, school counselors, and administrators) can do to both recruit and retain CLD students in gifted education.



TABLE 1

*Racial and Gender Composition of Gifted Students in 2002*

<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>School Enrollment</i>		<i>Gifted Enrollment</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	% <i>Female</i>	% <i>Male</i>	% <i>Female</i>	% <i>Male</i>	% <i>School District</i>	% <i>Gifted &amp; Talented</i>
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0.59	0.62	0.49	0.44	1.21	0.93
Black	8.46	8.7	4.78	3.65	17.16	8.43
Hispanic/Latino	8.67	9.13	5.36	5.05	17.80	10.41
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.14	2.28	3.65	3.43	4.42	7.64
White	28.81	30.61	36.71	35.88	59.42	72.59
Total	48.67	51.33	51.27	48.73	100.00	100.00

*Note.* Data from *Elementary and secondary school civil rights survey 2002*, U.S. Department of Education, 2002.

#### UNDERREPRESENTATION: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ISSUES

A lack of incentive and opportunity limits the possibility of high achievement, however superior one's gifts may be. Follow-up studies of highly gifted young African Americans, for instance, reveal a shocking waste of talent—a waste that adds an incalculable amount to the price of prejudice in this country (Educational Policies Commission, 1950).

To date, a disproportionate amount of the literature focuses on the recruitment aspect of underrepresentation, and particularly on intelligence tests and lack of teacher referral (Ford, 1994, 2004). The preponderance of research and scholarship indicates that poor IQ test performance by CLD students and low teacher expectations for these youngsters are the most salient reasons African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students are underrepresented in gifted education (Baldwin, 2005; Castellano & Diaz, 2001; Elhoweris, Kagendo, Negmeldin, & Holloway, 2005; Ford, 2004; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier, Garcia, & Passow, 1995; Whiting & Ford, 2006).

Over a decade ago, Ford (1994) proposed that to improve the representation of African American and other CLD students in gifted education, educational professionals (i.e., teachers, school counselors, administrators, policy makers, etc.) needed to focus on retention as well as re-

cruitment. She advocated following initiatives in higher education that went beyond the concept of "recruitment" (finding and placing students in gifted education) to focus on getting *and then keeping* CLD students in gifted education. Specifically, educators should (a) find effective measures, strategies, policies and procedures to better recruit CLD students; (b) find more effective and inclusive ways of retaining these students in gifted programs once recruited; and (c) collect data on factors affecting both the recruitment and retention of CLD students in gifted education in order to more completely understand and redress the issue. Karnes et al. (1997) and Marquardt and Karnes (1994) offered similar recommendations after reviewing OCR letters of findings.

In 2004, Ford reported that the notion of retention continued to be neglected when considering underrepresentation. This lack of attention to keeping CLD students in gifted programs and AP classes contributes to underrepresentation (Ford, 1996). Retention issues often fall into three categories: (a) social-emotional needs expressed by students, including relationships between CLD students, and with their classmates and teachers (Harmon, 2002; Louie, 2005); (b) concerns expressed by CLD families regarding their children's happiness and sense of belonging (Boutte, 1992; Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, & Tavegia, 2005); and (c) CLD students performing at acceptable achievement levels (Ford, 1996). For example, a Latino/a student may withdraw from an



AP class for any number of reasons—including feelings of isolation from educators and/or classmates, the majority of whom are likely to be White. Similarly, African American parents may feel forced to withdraw their child from such classes because their child complains of being treated unfairly and not fitting in with other students. Another possible case would be one in which a teacher requests removal of an American Indian student from gifted education or AP classes, attributing the student's low grades to misidentification and error in placement.

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Resolving the underrepresentation problem is not easy; there are no quick fixes. To begin this process, however, educators—teachers, school counselors, and administrators—must consider the following question: “How can we improve access to gifted education for CLD students, and once we successfully recruit them, how can we successfully retain them?”

Intentionally or unintentionally, gifted education and AP classes remain culturally, linguistically, and economically segregated (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, 2002; see also Table 1), still largely populated by White students in general and White middle-class students in particular. Recommendations regarding how to “desegregate” gifted education vary (Ford & Webb, 1994), but they share the goal of finding alternative ways—more valid and reliable instruments, processes and procedures—to equitably recruit and retain CLD gifted students. These options include culturally sensitive instruments (e.g., nonverbal tests), multidimensional assessment strategies, and broader philosophies, definitions, and theories of giftedness (Baldwin, 2005; Ford, 2005; Frasier et al., 1995; Milner & Ford, 2007; Naglieri & Ford, 2003, 2005; Sternberg, 2007).

Although most of the available literature focuses on recruitment, pointing to testing and as-

essment issues as primarily contributing to underrepresentation, we believe that underrepresentation is a symptom of a larger social problem, as discussed by Harry (2008). More directly, the main obstacle to the recruitment and retention of CLD students in gifted education appears to be a deficit orientation that persists in society and seeps into its educational institutions and programs (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, Moore, & Milner, 2005; Moore et al., 2006).

#### **DEFICIT THINKING: DENYING ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY**

The United States has a long history of fraudulent research, works, theories, paradigms, and conjecture that promotes deficit thinking about CLD groups, especially African Americans. Early in our history, African Americans and Latinos/as were deemed “genetically inferior”; later, they were viewed as “culturally deprived” or “culturally disadvantaged” (Gould, 1995; Valencia, 1997). The more recent and neutral nomenclature is that CLD groups are “culturally different.” Unfortunately, the arguments have gone full circle, with some recent literature reverting to genetic inferiority and cultural deprivation (e.g., Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) as the primary or sole explanation for the achievement gap and lower test scores of CLD students. (For a detailed examination of this issue, see Gould, 1995; Valencia, 1997.)

*Deficit thinking* is negative, stereotypical, and prejudicial beliefs about CLD groups that result in discriminatory policies and behaviors or actions. Deficit thinking and resignation are reflected in the statement of two participants interviewed by Garcia and Guerra (2004) who believed that the success of some children is set early and it is irrevocable: “Some children are already so harmed by their lives that they cannot perform at the same level as other children,” and “[i]f those neurons don't start firing at 8 or 9 months, it's never going to happen. So, we've got some connections that weren't made and they can't be made up” (p. 160).

According to Valencia (1997), “the deficit thinking paradigm posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies, such as cognitive and/or motivational limita-



tions, or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster—such as familial deficits and dysfunctions” (p. xi). Such thinking inhibits individuals from seeing strengths in people who are different from them; instead, attention centers on what is “wrong” with the “different” individual or group, having low expectations for them, feeling little to no obligation to assist them, and feeling superior to them. Deficit thinking, subsequently, hinders meaningful educational change and reform because educators are unwilling to assume or share any responsibility for CLD students’ poor school performance and outcomes (Berman & Chambliss, 2000; García & Guerra, 2004).

Like other types of thinking, deficit thinking affects behavior: People act upon their thoughts and beliefs. Consequent behaviors include (but are not limited to) a heavy reliance on tests with little consideration of biases, low referral rates of CLD students for gifted education services, and the adoption of policies and procedures that have a disparate impact on CLD students.

As Harry (2008) notes, deficit orientations go beyond thoughts, attitudes, and values; deficit-based orientations are evident in behaviors and actions. Specifically, ideas about group differences in capacity and potential influence the development of definitions, policies, and practices and how they are implemented. Gould (1981, 1995) and Menchaca (1997) noted that deficit thinking contributed to past (and current) beliefs about race, culture, achievement, and intelligence. Gould’s work helped to establish the reality that researchers or scientists are not objective, bias-free persons, and that preconceptions and fears about CLD groups (particularly African Americans) have led to polemical and prejudicial research methods, deliberate miscalculations, convenient omissions, and data misinterpretation among scientists studying intelligence. These prejudgments and related practices paved the way for the prevalent belief that human races could be ranked on a linear scale of mental worth (Gould, 1981, 1995).

Menchaca (1997) traced the evolution of deficit thinking and demonstrated how it influenced segregation in schools (e.g., *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896) and resistance to desegregation during the Civil Rights era and today. Some scholars have concluded that educators continue to resist desegregation, and use tracking and ability group-

ing to racially segregate students (e.g., Ford & Webb, 1994; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Oakes, 1985; Orfield & Lee, 2006). Accordingly, it seems reasonable to argue that much of the underrepresentation problem in gifted education stems from deficit thinking orientations. The impact of deficit thinking on gifted education underrepresentation should be clear when one considers how the terms *giftedness* and *intelligence* are used interchangeably, how both are subjective or social constructs (e.g., Sternberg, 2007), and how highly the educational elite and middle class prize gifted programs (e.g., Sapon-Shevin, 1994).

In this article we address four major symptoms or resultant behaviors of deficit thinking: (a) the reliance on traditional IQ-based definitions, philosophies, and theories of giftedness; (b) the dependence on identification practices and policies that have a disproportionately negative impact on diverse students (e.g., a reliance on teacher referral for initial screening); (c) the lack of commitment to helping educators become better prepared in gifted education; and (d) the lack of commitment among administrators to preparing educators to work competently with CLD students, which results in the inadequate training of teachers and other school personnel in multicultural education.

## DEFINITIONS, TESTING, AND ASSESSMENT

### *IQ-BASED DEFINITIONS AND THEORIES*

Debates are pervasive in education regarding how best to define the terms *intelligent*, *gifted*, and *talented*. A 1998 national survey of state definitions of gifted and talented students (Stephens & Karnes, 2000) revealed great differences and inconsistencies among the 50 states in their definitions. Most used the 1978 federal definition, which includes intellectual, creative, academic, leadership, and artistic categories. Other states have adopted either definitions derived from the Javits Act (1994), a definition created by Renzulli (1978), or the most recent federal definition (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Some states do not have a definition (see Davidson Institute, 2006). Further, most states continue—despite recognizing more than one type of



giftedness—to assess giftedness unidimensionally, that is, as a function of high IQ or achievement test scores. Such test-driven definitions may be effective at identifying middle-class White students (Sternberg, 2007), but they too infrequently capture giftedness among students who (a) perform poorly on paper-and-pencil tasks conducted in artificial or lab-like settings (Helms, 1992; Miller-Jones, 1989); (b) do not perform well on culturally loaded tests (e.g., Fagan & Holland, 2002; Flanagan & Ortiz, 2001; Kaufman, 1994; Sternberg, 2007); (c) have learning and/or cognitive styles that are different from White students (e.g., Hale, 2001; Helms, 1992; Hilliard, 1992; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997); (d) have test anxiety or suffer from stereotype threat (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Aronson & Steele, 2005; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995); or (e) have low academic motivation or engagement while being assessed (e.g., Wechsler, 1991).

#### TESTING AND ASSESSMENT ISSUES

The use of tests to identify and assess students is a pervasive educational practice that has increased with recent federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Test scores play the dominant role in identification and placement decisions. The majority of school districts use intelligence or achievement test scores for recruitment to gifted education (Davidson Institute, 2006; Davis & Rimm, 2003). This almost exclusive dependence on test scores for recruitment disparately impacts the demographics of gifted programs by keeping them disproportionately White and middle class. Although traditional intelligence tests, more or less, effectively identify and assess middle-class White students, they have been less effective for African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students (e.g., Helms, 1992; Miller-Jones, 1989; Naglieri & Ford, 2005; Skiba, Knesting, & Bush, 2002), including those at higher SES levels. This issue raises a fundamental question based on the Griggs Principle and the notion of disparate impact (see *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 1971).

In *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* (1971), African American employees at Duke Power's generating plant brought action pursuant to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, challenging the com-

pany's requirement of a high school diploma or passing of intelligence tests as a condition for employment or transfer to jobs at the plant. African American applicants, less likely to hold a high school diploma and averaging lower scores on the aptitude tests, were selected at a much lower rate for these positions when compared to White candidates. This case called into question the validity and utility of using tests for employment decisions. Duke Power had not attempted to demonstrate that the requirements were related to job performance. The lower court ruled that because no evidence of intent to discriminate existed, Duke Power did not discriminate. On appeal, however, a unanimous Supreme Court sided with Griggs, concluding that if a test adversely impacts a protected class, then the company must demonstrate the job-relatedness of the test used. The Court ruling led to this question: "If certain groups do not perform well on a test, why do we continue to use the test so exclusively and extensively?"

There are at least three explanations for the poor test performance of CLD students: (a) the burden rests within the test (e.g., test bias); (b) the burden rests with the educational environment (e.g., poor instruction and lack of access to high quality education contributes to poor test scores); or (c) the burden rests with (or within) the student (e.g., he/she is cognitively inferior or "culturally deprived").

The first two explanations recognize the influence of the environment (including schools) on test performance and might suggest that we need to make changes in assessment and educational practices that pose barriers to the participation of CLD students in gifted education, eliminating tests, policies, and procedures that have a disparate impact on CLD students (Karnes et al, 1997; Marquardt & Karnes, 1994; OCR, 2000, 2004, 2005). However, the third explanation is positioned in deficit thinking. Those who support this view relinquish any accountability for CLD students' underrepresentation and lower test scores because of the belief that genetics or heredity extensively determines intelligence, that intelligence is static, and that some groups are simply more intelligent than others (see Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Jensen, 1981; Rushton, 2003).



Decision makers must appreciate the impact of culture on test scores in order to use the scores in educationally meaningful and equitable ways (Ford, 2004; Ford & Frazier-Trotman, 2000; Helms, 1992; Miller-Jones, 1989; Sternberg, 2007). Educators need to understand how culturally loaded tests can lower CLD students' test scores (Fagan & Holland, 2002; Flanagan & Ortiz, 2001; Skiba et al., 2002). We must be conscientious in seeking to interpret and use test scores sensibly, to explore various explanations for the differential test scores, and to consider alternative instruments and assessment practices (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999).

### *INEFFECTIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES*

Procedural and policy issues also contribute to underrepresentation; of these, teacher referral is particularly worthy of attention. The teacher referral process contributes significantly to the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education. Specifically, educators systematically under-refer CLD students for gifted education services (e.g., Saccuzzo, Johnson, & Guertin, 1994). Teacher referral (and its rating checklists and forms), intentionally or unintentionally, serves as a gatekeeper, closing doors to gifted education classrooms for CLD students. The importance of addressing teacher referral as a gatekeeper is not an insignificant matter, as most states rely on teacher referral or completed checklists and forms for selecting students for gifted education placement (Davidson Institute, 2006; National Association for Gifted Children and State Directors of Gifted Education, 2005). Likewise, according to the College Board (2002), access to AP classes is primarily dependent on faculty recommendations, accounting for almost 60% of eventual placement.

The topic of teachers as referral sources for gifted education assessment and placement falls under the larger umbrella of the teacher expectations or perceptions, and subsequent student achievement and outcomes (Merton, 1948; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). This body of work refers to the extent to which a teacher's *a priori* judgment of a student's achievement corresponds

to the student's achievement (e.g., grades) or performance on some formal and objective measure, such as a standardized or achievement-related instrument (Rist, 1996; Zucker & Prieto, 1977).

Since at least the 1920s, researchers have examined the efficacy of teacher judgment when making referrals for gifted education screening, identification, and placement (e.g., Cox & Daniel, 1983; Gagne, 1994; Gear, 1976; Hoge & Coladarci, 1989; Pagnato & Birch, 1959; Terman, 1925). Not surprisingly, results have been mixed; some studies find teachers to be accurate in their referrals, whereas others find them to be inaccurate. For example, Terman found that teachers overlooked up to 25% of students eventually identified as highly gifted on an intelligence test; however, Gagne argued that teachers are effective and that some of the previous studies were methodologically and conceptually flawed. At least four factors appear to contribute to the differential findings: (a) different instruments used to validate teacher's judgment; (b) different referral forms, checklists, and other forms used by teachers; (c) different populations of gifted students being judged (e.g., gifted vs. highly gifted; male vs. female; younger vs. older students; high vs. low SES); and (d) different methodologies (e.g., use of vignettes vs. actual student cases).

### *TEACHER REFERRAL AND CLD STUDENTS*

Few studies or literature reviews have focused on teacher referral and identification of gifted students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. As previously noted, a body of scholarship has shown that some teachers have negative stereotypes and inaccurate perceptions about the abilities of CLD students—and their families (e.g., Boutte, 1992; Harmon, 2002; Huff et al., 2005; Louie, 2005; Rist, 1996; Shumow, 1997). Specifically, it is possible that teachers (the vast majority of whom are White) are more effective at identifying giftedness among White students, but less effective with CLD students. On this note, Beady and Hansell (1981) found that African American teachers held higher expectations of African American students than did White teachers (also see Ladson-Billings, 1994, and Irvine, 2002, on this issue).



In 1974, Fitz-Gibbons studied different components of identification for intellectually gifted low-income minority students in California, including tests and teacher referral. Relative to teacher referral, she concluded:

One might hazard the generalization that when teacher judgments are relied upon for placement or identification it is likely to be the child who does not relate to the teacher who gets overlooked, despite the fact that his achievements and ability are equal to or higher than those of the students recognized as bright. (pp. 61–62)

When CLD students were immature, taciturn, less comfortable with adults, or viewed as affable in some way, they were more likely to be overlooked by teachers.

Ford (1996) found that most of the African American students in one of her studies had high test scores—high enough to meet district criteria for identification and placement—but they were underrepresented in gifted education because teachers did not refer them for screening. For example, Dawn, an African American eighth grader, not only had high achievement scores (from the 95th to 99th percentile) each year tested, she had a perfect 4.0 cumulative GPA, and an IQ score of 143. Although Dawn had exceeded the identification and placement criteria (93rd percentile or higher on any subscale) since the third grade, she was not identified as intellectually or academically gifted, and she had not been referred for screening.

In a study of Hispanic and White students, Plata and Masten (1998) reported that White students were significantly more likely to be referred than Hispanic students, and White students were rated higher on a rating scale across four areas of giftedness—intelligence, leadership, achievement, and creativity (also see Pfeiffer, Petscher, & Jarosewich, 2007). Forsbach and Pierce (1999), in their sample of students in 199 middle schools in New York, found teacher referral ineffective as an identification tool for African American, Hispanic/Latino American, and Asian American students. After formal training, however, teachers were more effective at identifying gifted African American students only.

Two recent studies have continued this line of research on teacher referral and culturally di-

verse students. Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, and Holloway (2005) examined the effects of students' ethnicity on teachers' decision making using three vignettes of gifted students. Only the ethnicity of the student in the vignette changed. This impacted teacher referrals; specifically, "elementary school teachers treated identical information contained in the vignettes differently and made different recommendations despite the fact that the student information was identical in all ways except for ethnicity" (p. 29). Finally, in a study of referral sources using all elementary students in the state of Georgia, McBee (2006) reported that teacher referrals were more effective (accurate) for White and Asian students than for African American and Hispanic/Latino students. McBee concluded: "The results suggest inequalities in nomination, rather than assessment, may be the primary source of the underrepresentation of minority . . . students in gifted programs" (p. 103). Further, he noted that the findings could be interpreted in several ways, one being that "the low rate of teacher nomination could indicate racism, classism, or cultural ignorance on the part of teachers" (p. 109).

Shaunessy, McHatton, Hughest, Brice, and Ratliff (2007) focused on the experiences of bilingual Latino/a students in gifted and general education. Several students in their study believed that being gifted was special, and being culturally diverse and bilingual added to that specialness. One of the students in their study stated:

You're already special enough [because you are bilingual], but you are extra special because you are also gifted. . . . Latinos/as are not supposed to do well in school, and that's the expectation. So if you are gifted and Latino/a, then you've exceeded expectations. You feel a sense of pride, because you are doing better than even Americans are doing and you aren't even from here. (p. 177)

These Hispanic/Latino students appeared to believe, as proposed by Milner and Ford (2007) and Sternberg (2007), that cultural diversity cannot be ignored in our ideas, theories, and measures of giftedness, or in eventual placement. Despite the pride expressed by many of the students in the study by Shaunessy et al. (2007) about being gifted and culturally and linguisti-



cally diverse, all of these CLD youngsters had faced some form of discrimination; some students mentioned discriminatory school policies, and some did not feel accepted by White teachers and White students, both of whom made disparaging comments to them about their ethnicity (p. 179). When feeling isolated or rejected socially, CLD students and their parents may wish to withdraw their students from gifted education classes (Ford & Milner, 2006).

#### **INADEQUATE TEACHER PREPARATION IN GIFTED EDUCATION AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION**

VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2006) recently reported that only 3% of colleges and universities offer courses in gifted education. With so few opportunities for formal preparation in gifted education, how can we expect teachers to effectively identify, refer, and teach gifted students? This problem is compounded by the lack of teacher training in multicultural education or cultural diversity. Too few educators, even at the time of this writing, receive formal and meaningful exposure to multicultural educational experiences, multicultural curriculum and instruction, and internships and practicum in urban settings (see Banks, 1999, 2006; Banks & Banks, 2006). Frequently, such preparation is limited to one course on diversity (Banks & Banks, 2006). This is a "double whammy" when students are gifted and culturally and linguistically diverse.

Essentially, future professionals, including education majors at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, frequently matriculate with a monocultural or ethnocentric curriculum that does not prepare them to understand, appreciate, and work with students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (Banks, 2006). They consequently misunderstand cultural differences among CLD students relative to learning, communication, and behavioral styles. This cultural mismatch or clash between educators and students contributes to low teacher expectations of students, poor student-teacher relationships, mislabeling, and misinterpretation of behaviors (along with other outcomes), as previously noted.

In the Spring 2007 issue of *Roeper Review*, five of the nine articles focused on CLD gifted students (Chan, 2007; Milner & Ford, 2007; Pfeiffer et al., 2007; Shaunessy et al., 2007; Sternberg, 2007). Sternberg (2007) called for educators to be more proactive in understanding and making identification and placement decisions, placing culture at the forefront of our thinking and decisions. His article presents a forceful depiction of how culture affects what is valued as gifted and intelligence, how gifts and talents manifest themselves differently across cultures (also see Chan regarding leadership and emotional intelligence among Chinese students), and how our assessment instruments and the referral process should be culturally sensitive such that they do not hinder the recruitment and retention of CLD students in gifted education (Flanagan & Ortiz, 2001; Skiba et al., 2002; Whiting & Ford, 2006). Similarly, Milner and Ford shared cultural scenarios and models, and urged educators to assertively and proactively seek extensive training in cultural and linguistic diversity in order to become more culturally competent.

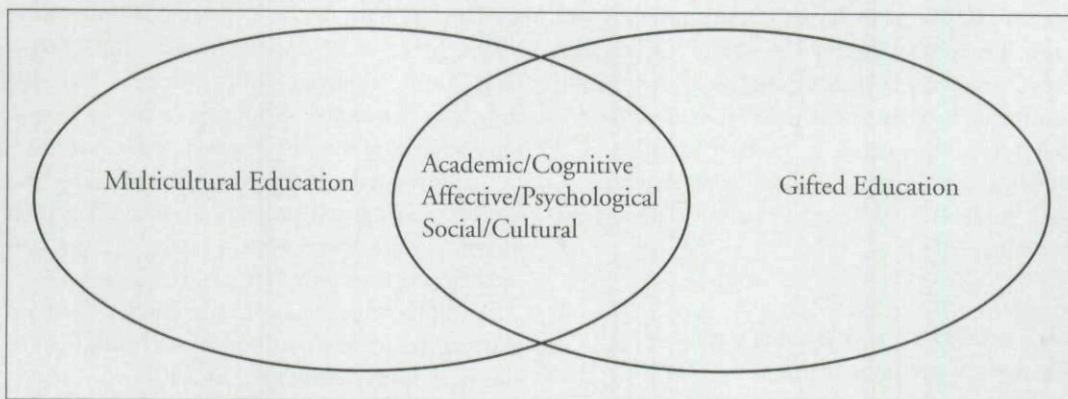
#### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE**

To recruit and retain more CLD students in gifted education and AP classes, school personnel and leaders must address low expectations and deficit thinking orientations, and the impact of such thinking on decisions, behaviors, and practice. This proactive attitudinal or philosophical shift increases the probability that educators will address all barriers to gifted education for CLD students. Figure 1 presents one model for reconceptualizing how educators can acquire the necessary dispositions, knowledge, and skills and competencies to work with students who are gifted and culturally and linguistically diverse. The Venn diagram suggests that teachers combine the best of research, policy, and theory in gifted education with the best of research, policy, and theory in multicultural education in order to meet the needs of gifted CLD students. Thus, we must study issues surrounding teacher referral of gifted students in general, as well as referral issues specific to culturally and linguistically diverse



**FIGURE 1**

*Meeting the Needs of CLD Gifted Students*



students. In other words, a cultural lens or frame of reference must always be used to examine the status of gifted education for students who are gifted as well as culturally and linguistically diverse. Figure 2 presents an overview of recruitment and retention barriers, along with suggested recommendations for addressing them.

*ADOPT CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE  
THEORIES AND DEFINITIONS OF  
GIFTEDNESS*

Although the federal government does not mandate gifted education services, it does propose definitions. In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education offered its most culturally responsive definition of gifted to date:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capacity in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, and unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. *Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.* (p. 19, emphases added)

This definition should appeal to those who are responsible for recruiting and retaining students into gifted education. First, the concept of talent development is a major focus of the defini-

tion. It recognizes that many students have had inadequate opportunities to develop and perform at high academic levels. For example, many students, especially those who live in poverty, lack exposure to books and other literature, they may not visit libraries or bookstores, and they often miss out on other meaningful educational experiences (Hart & Risley, 1995). Accordingly, the federal definition recognizes that students coming from high SES homes are likely to have such opportunities, which are likely to contribute to the fruition of their giftedness.

Further, the federal definition recognizes that some students face more barriers in life than others (including racial discrimination and prejudice). Discrimination and prejudice weigh heavily on the motivation, aspirations, and mental health (i.e., self-esteem, self-concept and racial identity) of CLD students and adults (e.g., Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Sue et al., 2007). Stated another way, discrimination places these students—at all levels of intelligence—at greater risk for low achievement, academic disengagement, school failure, and other social ills that have been described elsewhere (Allport, 1954; Constantine, 2007; Ford, Moore, & Whiting, 2006; Merton, 1948; Sue et al.). Two theories of intelligence show potential for recruiting and retaining CLD students in gifted education; both theories assert that “gifted” is a social construct, that definitions and views of giftedness vary from culture to culture, and that giftedness is not easily quantifiable and easily measured by tests (see Sternberg, 2007; Whiting & Ford, 2006). What is viewed as gifted in one



**FIGURE 2***Underrepresentation Barriers and Recommendations*

Barrier	Recommendation
Testing and assessment instruments that contain biases	Culturally sensitive measures that are reduced in cultural demand and linguistic demand
Policies and procedures that are both indefensible and have a disparate impact on CLD students	Policies and procedures examined for biases and negative impact, including teacher referrals, cut-off scores, weights assigned to items in matrices, and requirements associated with attendance, behavior, and GPA
Static definitions and theories of gifted that give little consideration to cultural differences and that ignore how students' backgrounds influence their opportunities to demonstrate skills and abilities	Culturally sensitive definitions and theories of gifted; definitions that recognize how differential opportunities result in poor outcomes for CLD students; definitions that recognize how differences can mask skills and abilities
Lack of teacher training in both gifted education and cultural diversity, which contributes deficit thinking about CLD students	Substantive, ongoing preparation of teachers in gifted education, cultural diversity, linguistic diversity, and economic diversity

culture may not be viewed and valued as gifted in another culture, and how giftedness is measured among different cultural groups varies as well. Our point here is to suggest that alternative theories and models of giftedness are needed that are sensitive to cultural differences.

Sternberg's (1985) Triarchic Theory of Intelligence proposes that intelligence is multidimensional and dynamic, and that no one type of intelligence or talent is superior to another. The theory holds that intelligence manifests itself in at least three ways: (a) componentially, (b) experientially, and (c) contextually. Componential learners are analytical and abstract thinkers who do well academically, and on achievement and standardized tests. Experiential learners value creativity and enjoy novelty. They often dislike rules and follow few of their own; they see rules as inconveniences meant to be broken. Contextual learners readily adapt to their environments (one of many skills that IQ tests fail to measure). They are street-smart and survivors, socially competent and practical, but they may not be high achievers in

school. Gardner (1983) defined intelligence as the ability to solve problems or to fashion products valued in one or more cultural settings, a stipulation that does not get much attention in other definitions. In his Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Gardner differentiated seven types of intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily kinesthetic, spatial, and musical. Each type of intelligence comprises distinct forms of perception, memory, and other psychological processes.

Both of these theories are inclusive, comprehensive, and culturally sensitive; they are flexible and dynamic theories which contend that giftedness is a sociocultural construct that manifests itself in many ways and means different things to different cultural and linguistic groups. The theorists recognize the many-sided and complex nature of intelligence and how current tests (which are too simplistic and static) fail to do justice to this construct (Ford, 2004; Gould, 1995; Sternberg, 2007).



## IDENTIFY AND SERVE GIFTED UNDERACHIEVERS

Related to this notion of talent development, it is important to consider gifted underachievers when discussing underrepresentation. Some perspectives specify that gifted students must be high achievers, equating giftedness with achievement or demonstrated performance. In schools that follow this philosophy, gifted students must demonstrate high achievement, otherwise they are unlikely to be identified or kept in gifted programs if their grades or test scores fall below a certain level. When one makes giftedness synonymous with achievement, gifted underachievers will be neither recruited nor retained. This has key implications for CLD students, too many of whom have lower grades and achievement scores than their White classmates. A wealth of reports under the topic of the achievement gap suggests that this problem cannot be ignored.

## ADOPT CULTURALLY SENSITIVE INSTRUMENTS

The most promising instruments for assessing the strengths of CLD students are nonverbal tests of intelligence, such as the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (NNAT; Naglieri, 1997), Universal Non-Verbal Intelligence Test (Bracken & McCallum, 1998), and Raven's Progressive Matrices (Raven, Raven, & Court, 2003). These tests are considered less culturally loaded than traditional tests (see Flanagan & Ortiz, 2001; Kaufman, 1994; Naglieri & Ford, 2003, 2005; Saccuzzo et al., 1994) and thus hold promise for more effectively assessing the cognitive strengths of CLD students. Saccuzzo et al., for instance, identified substantially more Black and Hispanic students using Raven's than using a traditional test, and reported that "50% of the non-White children who had failed to qualify based on a WISC-R qualified with the Raven" (p. 10), deciding that "the Raven is a far better measure of pure potential than tests such as the WISC-R, whose scores depend heavily on acquired knowledge" (p. 10). More recently, Naglieri and Ford (2003) reported that CLD students had comparable scores to White students on the NNAT, with IQs ranging from 96 to 99. This three-point difference is markedly less than the frequently reported 15-point gap that exists

on traditional IQ tests between Black and White students. These nonverbal tests give students opportunities to demonstrate their intelligence without the confounding influence of language, vocabulary, and academic exposure. Fagan and Holland (2002) conducted several studies showing that CLD students get comparable scores to White students when there is an equal opportunity to learn the material, specifically vocabulary and language skills.

## PROVIDE GIFTED EDUCATION PREPARATION FOR EDUCATORS

Few teachers have formal preparation in gifted education, leading us to question the extent to which teachers understand giftedness, are familiar with characteristics and needs of gifted students, are effective at referring students for gifted education screening and placement, and whether they can teach and challenge such students once placed.

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*Nonverbal tests give students opportunities to demonstrate their intelligence without the confounding influence of language, vocabulary, and academic exposure.*

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We recommend that teachers take advantage of opportunities to become more competent in gifted education, by enrolling in any relevant courses at local colleges and by attending professional development workshops and conferences in gifted education, such as the National Association for Gifted Children, Council for Exceptional Children (Talented and Gifted Summer Institute for the Gifted, SIG), and state and regional gifted conferences. Potential topics include definitions and theories of giftedness; identification and assessment; policies and practices; cross-cultural assessment, characteristics and needs of gifted students (e.g., intellectual, academic, social/emotional); curriculum and instruction; programming options; gifted underachievers; talent development; working with families; and underrepresentation.



## *PROVIDE MULTICULTURAL PREPARATION FOR EDUCATORS*

With forecasts projecting a growing CLD student population (Hochschild, 2005), teachers and other educators (e.g., school counselors and administrators) will have to bear a greater responsibility for demonstrating multicultural competence (Banks & Banks, 2006; Ford & Milner, 2006). Multicultural education preparation among all school personnel—teachers, school counselors, psychologists, administrators, and support staff—must focus on knowledge, dispositions, and skills. Comprehensive preparation should help school personnel become culturally competent so that deficit orientations no longer impede diverse students' access to gifted education. This preparation can increase the recruitment and retention of CLD students in gifted education—if it permeates educational and professional development experiences.

Banks and Banks (2006) offer one model for infusing multicultural content into the curriculum. At the contributions and additive levels, diversity is addressed superficially: Students are exposed to safe topics and issues; diversity permeates only a few courses; and alternative perspectives, paradigms, and theories are avoided. These two lower levels tend to promote or reinforce stereotypes about diverse groups. However, these shortcomings are rectified at the higher levels of transformation and social action. A transformational curriculum shares multiple perspectives; teachers are encouraged to be empathetic and to infuse multicultural teaching strategies, materials, and resources into all subject areas and topics as often as possible. Finally, teachers can be catalysts, agents of social change; if they are taught to be empowered, social justice is at the heart of their teaching. To become more culturally aware, sensitive, and competent, educators must

1. Engage in critical self-examination that explores their attitudes and perceptions concerning cultural and linguistic diversity, and the influence of these attitudes and perceptions on CLD students' achievement and educational opportunities.
2. Acquire accurate information about CLD groups (e.g., histories, cultural styles, values,

customs and traditions, child rearing practices, etc.) and use this information to support and guide students as they matriculate through school.

3. Acquire formal and ongoing multicultural preparation in order to maximize their understanding of and skills at addressing the academic, cognitive, social, psychological, and cultural needs and development of CLD students.

## *ONGOING EVALUATION OF UNDERREPRESENTATION*

Along with OCR (2000, 2004, 2005), we recommend that educators design racial equity plans to monitor gifted education data, including demographics, referrals, and instruments, all with the notion of disparate impact and eventual underrepresentation in mind. These data should be disaggregated by race, gender, and income level (Black males on free or reduced lunch vs. White males paying full price, teacher referral of American Indian males vs. all other males, patterns of referral by teacher demographics, patterns of representation across grade levels and school buildings, etc.) and should focus on both recruitment and retention barriers (e.g., What percentage of CLD students compared to White students leave gifted education and AP classes, and for what reasons? How many complaints are received about inequities in gifted education and what is the nature of these complaints?). Other recommendations include

- Changing or eliminating any policies and practices that have a disparate impact on CLD students relative to their representation in gifted education (e.g., teacher referral, family referral, peer referral, tests, definitions, checklists, nomination forms, views about underachievement).
- Setting concrete and measurable goals for changing the demographics of gifted education, and otherwise improving the experiences and outcomes of CLD students.
- Reviewing these goals, plans, policies and practices annually, and making changes where necessary (i.e., retrain teachers and other school personnel who do not refer



CLD students for gifted education screening, adopt alternative assessments, modify screening and placement criteria, provide different or additional support to CLD students and families, increase or modify professional development in gifted education and multicultural education).

## SUMMARY

Since its development, gifted education has failed to adequately provide access to gifted education and AP classes for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students have always been poorly represented in gifted education. We believe that the problem is complex, but not insoluble. Educators, particularly those in positions of authority, must explore this complex and pervasive problem, and then become proactive in eliminating all barriers that prevent CLD students from being recruited and retained in gifted education. Attitudinal changes are essential, as are changes in instruments, and policies and practices.

The underrepresentation problem is a result of both recruitment barriers and retention barriers; recruitment often receives greater attention because there is more data and information on this issue. A lack of preparation in and sensitivity to the characteristics of gifted students, a lack of understanding of needs and development of gifted CLD students, and a lack of attention to multicultural preparation all undermine educators' competency at making fair and equitable referrals and decisions. All educators—teachers, school counselors, and administrators—should seriously and honestly examine their respective school context to make changes, and seek the preparation and knowledge necessary to work with gifted students, CLD students, and gifted CLD students. The time to open doors to gifted education and AP classes is long overdue.

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