



Responding to the Needs of Diverse Gifted Students

*A Position Statement of the
Minnesota Educators of the Gifted and Talented (MEGT)*

Purpose

Gifted learners are diverse. They come from all cultural, socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups. While gifted programs exist to ensure all students with outstanding talent have the opportunity to reach their full potential, learners with diverse backgrounds and experiences have historically been under-represented in gifted programs. It is the obligation of gifted services to address the needs of all gifted learners, including those from diverse backgrounds. The purpose of this paper is to present issues and make recommendations about the identification and education of the diverse gifted learner, and to encourage open dialogue about the needs of these learners.

Issues

Gifted students are children and youth with outstanding talent relative to others of their age, experience, or environment. These talents may be highly obvious to even the most inexperienced eye, or hidden by any number of factors. Often gifted programs are designed to address giftedness based on academic achievement or traditional measures of success. These programs may overlook those gifted students whose talent is not immediately apparent and who need help in developing their potential. Gifted students can be overlooked based on issues of perception, limitations of identification tools, incomplete curriculum development, cultural differences, institutional practices and biases, and depth of professional development of educational staff.

-  Giftedness manifests itself differently among cultural groups, and these differences are not always recognized within our schools.
-  Identification protocols tend to identify majority culture students, and not those across diverse student groups.
-  Affective needs of culturally diverse gifted students may be unique and not addressed by schools in their gifted curriculum and programs.
-  Diverse gifted students may have areas of low performance, such as challenges with learning a new language. The educational focus may be on the challenges the student faces rather than on the strengths the student possesses.
-  Not all students have access to the resources they need to excel in school.
-  The academic content of curriculum often does not resonate with or engage diverse gifted students, leading to disenfranchisement with learning.
-  Teachers may have incorrect assumptions about students from particular cultural groups or those living in poverty. These assumptions can include misperceptions about what these students are capable of accomplishing, leading to low academic expectations.
-  Teacher pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities in recognizing and designing learning for diverse gifted students are lacking
-  Institutional bias, such as school district practices, selection of texts, expectations for students, and student placement, among others, may prevent diverse gifted learners from having their needs met.



Recommendations

-  Acknowledge that the characteristics of gifted students may look different based on cultural filters.
-  Use multiple measures when identifying diverse students, such as portfolios, interviews, personal recommendations, and performance assessments.
-  Identify characteristics of giftedness across cultures by involving representative multicultural community members in the conversation at both a district and school level.
-  Foster opportunities for effective support for diverse students through options such as professional, community, or peer mentors.
-  Adjust instructional strategies to acknowledge that home resources or support might not be in place. (for example, scheduling opportunities to complete projects during class time.)
-  Develop curriculum and learning activities that take into consideration cultural perspectives and student interests or preferences, differentiating the learning to respond to individual needs of the diverse gifted learner.
-  Design and implement curriculum that addresses the specific affective needs of diverse gifted learners.
-  Expose diverse students to gifted adults from their culture and community.
-  Create staff development opportunities that address the academic and affective needs of diverse gifted students and open collective staff understanding by addressing misconceptions and biases based on differences in cultural perspectives.
-  Identify and modify school practices that present a bias against the diverse gifted learner. These may include practices related to student placement procedures, textbook selection, choice of curriculum content, instructional practices, and student awards and recommendations.

References

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