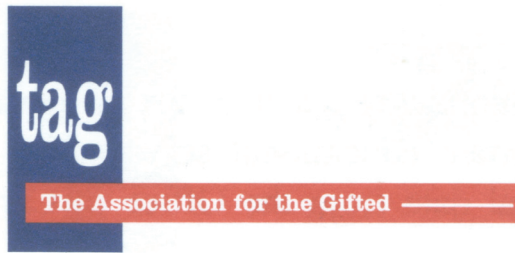


Diversity and Developing GIFTS AND TALENTS



A National Call to Action



The Association for the Gifted
Council for Exceptional Children

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About The Association for the Gifted (TAG): TAG's primary purpose is to promote the welfare and education of children and youth with gifts, talents, and/or high potential. TAG strives to improve educational opportunities for individuals from all diverse groups with gifts, talents, and/or high potential; sponsor and foster activities to develop the field of gifted education, such as the dissemination of information, the conduct of research, and other scholarly investigations; support and encourage specialized professional preparation for educators of individuals with gifts, talents, and/or high potential, as well as for professional persons in related areas; work with organizations, agencies, families, or individuals whose purposes are consistent with its own. For more information, visit <http://www.cectag.org>.

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INTRODUCTION

Diversity and excellence are each essential to the realization of ideals in a democratic society. These ideals have been the cornerstone of our achievements as a society. Diversity has been a topic of discussion in America for decades. Embedded in discussions of diversity and excellence are race, culture, ethnic, class, gender, sexual orientation, and linguistic issues. Nowhere are these issues more evident than in education. As our society continues to become more diverse, it is even more important that we develop the great variety of gifts and talents of all children and youth in our nation.

NEED

The need for a national call to action about diversity and developing gifts and talents derives from the continuing and significant underrepresentation of specific groups receiving educational services for the gifted and talented. This underrepresentation belies the premise that the capacity for exceptional achievement exists across racial, ethnic, language, and economic groups as well as some categories of disability. With all children and youth, expressions of potential differ as a result of family background and experiences with social institutions. As we continue to implement traditional educational policies and practices, we ignore these differences and contribute to the inequities. Our schools must reflect society's changing values about excellence and the needs of its people.

Ideas of capability are neither static nor value-free, but change as society evolves. The U.S. Census Bureau projects rapidly increasing percentages of Hispanic, Asian American, African American, Native American, and multiracial citizens. Other changes in how Americans live their lives, such as lifestyle, family structure, or use of technology, accompany our changing population. We must move toward ensuring equitable outcomes for all children and youth in educational programs.

Despite the emergence of promising practices for recognizing and providing appropriate educational services for a diverse population, national data from the Office for Civil Rights show little evidence of positive change. Promising procedures are discontinued or never adopted for many reasons. The reasons may be as simple as children not succeeding because their behavior conflicts with teacher beliefs about diversity and giftedness. Or, the reasons may be as complex as entrenched policies that prohibit the implementation of promising practices. America must embrace diversity as a rich source of excellence.

What Will YOU Do?

Activism is needed to achieve the radical shift in our thinking that will move education to a new level of understanding and to a new level of innovative possibilities for service delivery. We believe there is no incompatibility between diversity and excellence.

What can you do to create awareness of how diverse talents are recognized by various cultural groups in our society and how these contribute to the richness of the American experience?

What can you do to assure minority representation from diverse groups at all levels of decision-making in gifted education, including the national office, national organizations, state departments of education, local programs, and professional publications?

VISIONS AND DIRECTIONS

This call for action requires thinking in terms of a more global system involving educators, families, communities, and businesses joining together to educate children at the edge of their ability. The home, the community, and the school are all places where children learn and may be encouraged to grow. Each of these places is important in the development of individuals. We propose action in four areas:

- preparing school personnel,
- ensuring equitable curriculum and learning environments,
- finding giftedness, and
- including diversity in research.



Myth Busting!

PREPARING SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Programs that prepare school personnel will recognize and embrace diversity as a source of strength and richness to help educators maintain high expectations and guard against unwarranted assumptions about diverse students. Educators must examine traditional beliefs in order to identify those that are true and those that are faulty.

Recognition of potential giftedness across widely diverse groups must be a central focus of undergraduate and preparatory teacher education programs. Diversity is the umbrella under which topics in all coursework and field experiences must be developed.

Teacher preparation programs must recruit people from diverse cultures to teach students with gifts and talents. These teachers bring knowledge from a cultural perspective that is now missing and will enhance the educational experiences of all.

A wide variety of persons must be involved in preparing school personnel for general education and specialized educational services. These persons may be drawn from public school faculties, university faculties, parents, primary caregivers, and community resources to deliver instruction. Prospective teachers of the gifted and talented and other school personnel will then have reality-based information.

Preparation programs for educators must:

- Emphasize multicultural sensitivity.
- Understand unique signs of giftedness in diverse learners.
- Design classroom structures that recognize and nurture diverse talents.
- Empower diverse students to exhibit their gifts and talents.
- Design strategies for working effectively within diverse schools and communities.
- Expand field experiences to better understand the school culture of diverse giftedness.
- Collaborate with schools in providing services for gifted and talented students from diverse backgrounds.
- Empower administrators to create environments that nurture diversity.

Educator recruitment, preparation, and development include systematic efforts to involve personnel from diverse ethnic and language backgrounds and to prepare educators for effective practice with diverse groups of students.

ENSURING EQUITABLE CURRICULUM AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Curriculum is the sum of experiences that help each student develop his or her talents. It is more than instruction, materials, or disparate programs. Curriculum should be challenging, multicultural, standards-based, and respectful of student interests. Instruction should be purposefully and strategically matched to learner background, experience, language, and talent, balancing needs for learner-directed and teacher-directed strategies.

It is critical that the curricula focus on developing diverse gifts and talents that are connected to valued areas of adult activity. Within an ethical framework, each child's strengths must be valued, described, and nurtured. This process recognizes that students are, and will be, a part of a larger society.

Making curriculum meaningful to the learner and having that curriculum linked to diversity in real-world accomplishments are the keys to individualizing instruction. The curriculum must be rigorous, relevant, and respectful. Students must have the opportunity to recognize their individual worth to society as well as society's value to them.

We must maintain high academic standards. The key concept must be that a rigorous but not a rigid curriculum is designed for each gifted learner. Rigor is not diminished when different ways of knowing are recognized.

We must respect each student's culture and background while teaching skills that may seem to oppose his or her belief systems, such as questioning authority and accepting that girls can be scholarly and boys can be artists and dancers. Curriculum must, therefore, be arranged so that it is possible for each student to learn at the edge of his or her ability in valued areas of adult activity.

To accomplish these goals, we need to:

- Study state and national policies to ensure equitable outcomes.
- Acknowledge that teachers do not need to be experts in all cultures, but do need to be sensitive to differences that influence learning.
- Provide options for students to have educational experiences at the high edge of their abilities.
- Acknowledge that some learners are more capable than others at some tasks at the same point in time.
- Provide multiple learning services such as opportunities for interacting with high-performing peers, acceleration, and enrichment.
- Establish mentorships in worthwhile lines of adult activity for students at all educational levels.
- Provide experiences for students to be involved in adult fields.

Curriculum and learning environments designed to support diversity and excellence are delivered in ways that are comprehensive, flexible, fluid, and research-based. Educational services must consider family and student preferences for individual or cooperative learning. These services must provide opportunities for students to move ahead in any area of learning.



What Will YOU Do?

FINDING GIFTEDNESS

The recognition of potential requires that standards of excellence must be adapted to the notion that advanced expression in any endeavor is an authentic measure.

Recognition of diverse gifts and talents is not so obvious. A purposeful activity within a professionally prepared environment will reveal the varied hints and clues of this potential.

Assessment of potential is a dynamic process of “looking out” for those who show a propensity to advance in areas related to the real world of people. Present performance is linked to future behavior. The hints and clues of potential include motivation and volition.

Self-initiated learning is one of the clues to developing a gift or talent. It is the responsibility of society to foster excellence to the degree that the child wants to and is willing to respond. Children and youth are rewarded with esteem and a strong belief in their own abilities when they are engaged in studies at their own level of interest and strength.

To accomplish these goals, we need to:

- Shift student assessment from static to dynamic and authentic (performance-based) strategies.
- Consider resilience and high motivation to achieve in a worthwhile line of human endeavor a significant clue to unusual potential.
- Encourage the motivation of students who show signs and hints of high-performance capability that might be masked by disability or experience.
- Establish a national initiative for developing model projects to highlight the manifestations of talents within specific social, cultural, linguistic, racial, and ethnic groups.

INCLUDING DIVERSITY IN RESEARCH

Research is the foundation upon which we base our educational decision-making. Appropriate and purposeful standards-based curricula rely on research that has equitable representation of all aspects of today’s changing populations. Research guiding gifted services must be designed to support diversity and excellence.

Past trends in research have ignored the experiences of children and youth from diverse backgrounds who are gifted and talented. To date, little disaggregation of data has been done for these diverse populations.



Watching for the Spark . . .

What Will YOU Do?

Including diverse voices and evidence of learning outcomes of students from diverse backgrounds challenges and changes the understanding of needs in research.

We believe that research about all aspects of gifted education must represent topics relevant to diverse populations and be based in methods that advance understanding of diversity.

What Will YOU Do?

To accomplish these goals, we need to:

- Propose research recommendations that demonstrate a commitment to diversity.
- Encourage professional journal editors to prioritize diversity as a criterion for publication.
- Evaluate research and evidence-based learning strategies with a critical eye for the inclusion of diversity.
- Encourage high-quality research methodologies sensitive to topics relevant to diverse populations.
- Recruit researchers from diverse backgrounds.

What Will YOU Do?

SUMMARY

This call to action for the education of children and youth from diverse backgrounds requires advocacy and a shift in thinking and practice. This shift mandates that educators view students and educational services in a fresh and different manner. It calls for a dramatic departure from the current educational practices in states and local school systems across our nation.

We believe that by dealing with the issues surrounding diversity and excellence in education, our country will be stronger. By committing to develop the great variety of gifts and talents of our nation's youth, we enhance both their potential and the potential of our country.

You are invited to embrace the goals proposed in this national call to action and decide how you will be a part of this effort for change.