Understanding Culture, Power, and Difference through Critical Self-Reflection

Implications for equity in gifted education
Objectives

- Develop common understanding of terminology related to equity issues in gifted education
- Better understand the root causes of racial/ethnic and cultural bias in gifted education
- Understand how one’s social identity shapes their pedagogy and practices related to the identification and retention of marginalized youth for gifted education
- Facilitate development of students’ cultural competency through gifted education
The Big Picture

The World
Spheres of Influence for the Gifted Child

- Community (norms, expectations, values, etc.)
- Peers (norms, expectations, values, etc.)
- The Gifted Child (norms, values, beliefs, expectations, etc.)
- Family (norms, expectations, values, etc.)
- School (teacher, curriculum, culture and climate, etc.)
What We Know

Social and Cultural Obstacles for Marginalized Youth with Potential for GATE

- Experiences with racial discrimination
- Negative peer pressure
- Poor parental involvement
- Negative/lowered teacher and counselor expectations
What We Know

Cultural Bias in Identification Process

- Narrow definitions of giftedness
- Choices of biased testing instruments/narrow interpretation of data
- Use of teacher nomination forms/checklists that fail to reflect a diversity of characteristics of giftedness
- Ill-prepared screening and placement committees (for judging the test data)
- Lack of knowledge about/failure to consider effects of stereotype threat on student performance
- Failure to use alternative assessment strategies

(Callahan, Tomlinson, & Pizzat, 1994; Castellano, 2004; Ford, Grantham, & Milner, 2004; Klug, 2004; National Research Council, 2002)
What We Know

Structural factors such as:

- Isolation resulting from being ‘the only one’ or ‘one of a few’ in a GATE program
- Irrelevant curriculum
- Instructional practices that are based on competition or on methods of instruction that are culturally mismatched to the learning practices of the students’ communities
- Inattention to social relationship building
- Emotional distress emanating from perceptions of responsibility/stress of representing a particular group

Moore, Ford, & Milner (2005)
“The trouble around diversity isn’t just that people are different from one another. The trouble is that society is organized in ways that encourage people to use difference to include or exclude, reward or punish, credit or discredit, elevate or oppress, value or devalue” - Alan Johnson, 2006
As educators, we have to take the ownership of teaching, learning, and outcome gaps in our school environments without blaming our students, families and the larger community.
What is Culture?

- A shared, learned, symbolic system of values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldviews that shapes and influences one’s perceptions, behaviors and interaction patterns in the world.

- Created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, religion, or other shared identity (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

- Culture is created and re-created in the contexts of our everyday lives; it’s dynamic, not static; it’s context-specific.
What is Culture?

- Culture is context-specific
  - What is normative in one environment might not be normative in another

- Subcultures exist within cultures
  - Example: Women as a cultural group and the subcultures within the group

- Culture is not synonymous with race
  - Race is often coded as ‘cultural difference’
Multiple Worlds Typology
(Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998)
Working through Cultural Differences

Educator
- Norms
- Values
- Beliefs
- Expectations
- Interaction Styles
- Ways of knowing

Student
- Norms
- Values
- Beliefs
- Expectations
- Interaction Styles
- Ways of Knowing

Classroom

Biases
Stereotypes
Assumptions
Equity, Identity, and Achievement

- Identity
  - Imposed
  - Performed

- Teachers
  - Beliefs and Attitudes
  - Pedagogy and Practice

- Environment
  - Home
  - School
  - Peers
  - Larger Society

Culture is embedded in all of these pieces!
Equity Challenges in Teaching and Learning

When educators don’t attend to issues of race, culture, and power in the classroom they run the risk of embodying and enacting deficit pedagogies and practices.
## Toward an Asset-Based Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deficit-Based</th>
<th>Asset-Based/Strengths-Based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s primary role is to fill gaps in students’ skills and knowledgebase</td>
<td>Teacher’s primary role is to recognize students bring cultural assets to the classroom, and utilize those to grow skills and knowledgebase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student needs “fixing”</td>
<td>Recognize students’ personal strengths and help students feel they can contribute to their own educational growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student failure is based on internal deficiencies (in genetics, racial/ethnic culture, social class, familial socialization)</td>
<td>What are the learning and achievement possibilities for students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-centered instructional practice; less impetus to change instructional practice</td>
<td>Innovative instructional practice; culturally relevant and responsive practice; use of equity pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical/instructional approach rooted in negative assumptions and beliefs about children and their families and home environment</td>
<td>Pedagogical/instructional approach assumes all students bring cultural assets to the classroom</td>
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## Toward an Asset-Based Approach

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<tr>
<td>He can’t do the work.</td>
<td>He can do the work. He will do the work. He needs the necessary resources and supports in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>place to cultivate his growth and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s good enough for her. That’s all I expected.</td>
<td>She can do better, and I expect and want more for her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These students are so lazy.</td>
<td>These students have learned poor work habits, or have had ineffective teachers in the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I will use a different approach this year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If she doesn’t succeed, it’s really her fault. I did the best I could.</td>
<td>Have I/we exhausted all reasons for how this student ended up in this position (considering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>personal, institutional, and structural), and what more I/we can do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She’s not able to grasp the concepts. She’s just not that smart/gifted.</td>
<td>Are there other methods/approaches/programs that could be used to help this student learn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivational techniques?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Components of Strengths-Based Instruction

- Establish a warm and caring environment
- Foster one-on-one relationships with students
- Utilize multiple learning strategies
- Reward effort
- Recognize progress
- Embody love, acceptance, and respect
The most common way that students get assigned to gifted classes is by *teacher recommendation*. 
Students’ Narratives about Achievement

- Internal (shaped by societal narratives, home, peer group, the media, etc.)
- External narratives (coming from society)
Marginalized students internalize negative stereotypes about their group and underperform in an atmosphere where they perceive those stereotypes are present.
WHO ARE YOU?
Critical Self-Reflection
What Are Your Lenses?

Race  Language  Ethnicity  Social Class  Age
Gender  Sexuality  Religion  Ability
1. How does my social identity inform/shape my pedagogy and practices?

2. In what areas do I need to learn more about culture, power, privilege and difference to best serve all youth?

3. What accountability measures are in place for me to “grow” and implement my awareness as a critically race conscious educator?
## Privilege, Power, and Difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Marker (Societal Dominant Group)</th>
<th>Your Social Group Membership</th>
<th>Dominant</th>
<th>Targeted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race (White, Black/AfAm, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Latin@/Hispanic*, Native American, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Class (lower class, working class, middle class, upper middle/upper class)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (man, woman, transgender, queer)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion (Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, no religion, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability (able-bodied, differently abled)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language (native English speaker, Second Language Learner, English Language Learner)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Identity Marker (Societal Dominant Group)** | Dominant | Your Group Membership |
---|---|---|
**Race** (White, Black/AfAm, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Latina/o, Native American, etc.) | White |  |
**Social Class** (lower class, working class, middle class, upper middle, upper class) | Upper class |  |
**Gender** (man, woman, transgender, queer, etc.) | Men |  |
**Sexual Orientation** (heterosexual, gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual, etc.) | Heterosexual |  |
**Religion** (Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, no religion, etc.) | Christian |  |
**Ability** (able-bodied, differently abled) | Able-bodied |  |
**Language** (Native English Speaker, Second Language Learner, English Language Learner) | Native (Standard) English Speaker |  |

*Universities operate under and promote dominant cultural codes; they are inherently racialized, classed, cisgendered, heterosexist, homophobic spaces*
A Handbook for Action
## Colorblindness

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mind-set</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>If I acknowledge the racial or ethnic background of my students or myself, I may be considered racist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>If I admit that people experience the world differently and that race is an important part of people’s experiences, I may be seen as “politically incorrect.” I may offend others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I should treat all my students the same regardless of who they are, what their home situations are, or what their experiences happen to be.</td>
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</table>

Milner (2011)
The Bootstraps Metaphor
The Myth of Meritocracy

Hard Work + Effort = “The American Dream”
(a grit narrative)

Hard Work + Effort + Overcoming Barriers = “The American Dream”
What is Implicit Bias?

- Implicit Bias . . .
  - refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness.

- The implicit associations we harbor in our subconscious cause us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance. These associations develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages. In addition to early life experiences, the media and news programming are often-cited origins of implicit associations.

Kirwin Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, The Ohio State University
Types/Profiles of Giftedness

1. Type I – The Successful
2. Type II – The Challenging
3. Type III – The Underground
4. Type IV – The Dropout/At-Risk
5. Type V – The Double-Labeled
6. Type VI – The Autonomous Learner

Betts & Neihart (2008)
Unique Learners: Six Profiles of G/T
(Betts & Neihart, 2008)

- **Successful**
  - Boredom/dependent
  - Consumer of knowledge
  - Achieves at high level
  - Conformist/needs challenge

- **Challenging**
  - Creative/bored/frustrated
  - Not grade motivated
  - Rebellious
  - Needs connection

- **Underground**
  - Denies talent/challenges
  - Unsure/conflicted
  - Seen as average
  - Needs support/freedoms

- **At-Risk**
  - Angry/depressed/explosive
  - Critical/afraid/loner
  - Unaccepted/different
  - Needs alternative environment

- **2X/Multi Exceptional**
  - Learned helplessness
  - Frustration/poor academics
  - Lack of self-confidence
  - Needs advocates/understanding

- ***Autonomous**
  - Self-confident/achiever
  - Intrinsic motivation
  - Stands up for self
  - Needs opportunities
## Types/Profiles of Giftedness

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<th>The Successful</th>
<th>The Dropout</th>
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<td>Achieves at high levels, represents up to 90% of identified gifted students in school programs</td>
<td>Angry, feel rejected, needs have not been met or have been ignored. May act out/be defensive, or may be depressed and withdrawn</td>
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<th>The Challenging</th>
<th>The Double-Labeled</th>
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<td>Divergently gifted, often not identified in schools</td>
<td>Typically either ignored because perceived as average or referred for remedial assistance</td>
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<th>The Underground</th>
<th>The Autonomous Learner</th>
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<td>Wants to hide their giftedness to better fit in with their peers</td>
<td>Uses the system to create new opportunities</td>
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Consider the operational definition of giftedness

- Is it broad and multi-faceted in conception and in translation into practices of identification and programming? (Callahan, Tomlinson, & Pizzat, 1994; Frasier & Passow, 1994)

Carefully examine the identification process for cultural bias

Use a talent development program (Callahan, Tomlinson, Moon, Tomchin, & Plucker, 1995; Kornhaber, 2004)

At the secondary level, specific and targeted support structures, coupled with a rigorous commitment to providing scaffolding