

# Addressing the ‘Gifted Gap’: Three Strategies

**A**s an educational community, we are constantly analyzing our strengths and weaknesses to determine how well we are meeting the needs of all students. Often, we measure our performance in terms of ‘growth’ and ‘gaps’. Gifted education equity advocates, school personnel, and policymakers are always on the alert for new information addressing gaps in performance and opportunities for students who are typically underserved in gifted programs.

A recent study reported that across the nation, Black and Hispanic students continue to be under-served in gifted programs at an alarming rate (Yaluma & Joyner, 2018). Actually, the report notes that only three of the nation’s state data indicate equitable services for Black and Hispanic students. For many of us, these statistics are not at all surprising. In the report, several practices are noted that appear to have some impact on addressing the ‘Gifted Gap’ in schools. Based on my experience and involvement with schools and communities across the nation over the past 25 years or so, there are at least three strategies that I would like to recommend as doable for schools to use in their efforts to address this ‘Gifted Gap’.

## Universal Screening

Universal screening is the process used to provide an assessment for students of one or more grade levels at the same time. Universal screening does not depend on referrals. We know from research that teacher referrals are not the most effective way to locate gifted students from diverse groups. Actually, teacher referrals can become a barrier to access. Students of color with the same ability and performance indicators are far less likely than their white peers to be referred by classroom teachers. Universal screening eliminates this barrier. In a district that I worked in for a few years, we used the results of the CogAt test to locate students in schools who were previously not referred and had not been identified. When our list of top percentile students was circulated, many teachers were surprised. The universal screening allowed our team to place these students in the pool of candidates for further assessment. As a result, we were able to increase the numbers of students identified as gifted in Title I schools where previously there were none. Universal screening does work!

## Proactive Engagement of Families and Communities of Color

Proactive engagement involves sharing of gifted education service information across the school district. It is highly recommended that families be alerted to the benefits of gifted education through literature and open forum meetings that can be hosted in schools, churches, public libraries and commu-

nity centers. I have presented in such events and on numerous occasions, parents would approach me afterwards and say, *‘this is the first time I heard about gifted programs’* or *‘I never thought about my child in this way, I knew he was different, but...’*. Families and communities who have been marginalized in public education are too often the last to know about the benefits of advanced learner services. When we begin to open doors of gifted education and engage more families and communities in a proactive way, we can close and eliminate some of the gaps that persist in our schools, particularly the gifted gap. Distributing literature in public places makes it more likely for parents to believe their children may be eligible and that the program is ‘for them’ as much as for any other family.

## Culturally Responsive Teaching in ALL Classrooms

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) recognizes the importance of including students’ culture in every aspect of teaching. Every child is shaped by culture that includes family norms, traditions, and historical legacies. Many scholars have developed frameworks for shaping curriculum that can help educators ensure that their school environments are welcoming places for all students. Some of the markers of CRT are: using culture as a mediator for instruction; communicating high expectations for all students; and presenting student-centered instruction. Using culturally authentic materials is also critical to CRT. When students see themselves, they feel welcomed and validated as learners. Such validation can help increase students’ willingness to demonstrate their interests as they identify with the materials in books and other resources where individuals who look like them are represented. Utilizing cultural inclinations and norms in the creation of activities may encourage students in ways that they may not have been in classrooms that are non-representational. Using multiple modalities or cross disciplinary instruction may also help engage students differently and bring out their interests in a more dynamic manner.

Using these strategies will help schools everywhere embrace their culturally diverse identity and provide equitable access for all children to advanced learning experiences thereby, addressing the ‘gifted gaps’ that currently exist. **THP**

## References

- Yaluma, C. & Tyner, A. (2018) Is there a gifted gap?: Gifted education in high poverty schools. <https://edexcellence.net/publications/is-there-a-gifted-gap>
- Card & Juliano (2015) Can universal screening increase the representation of low income and minority students in gifted education? National Bureau of Economic Research <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21519>