Beyond Deficit Thinking:
Providing Access for Gifted African American Students

Donna Y. Ford
J. John Harris III
Cynthia A. Tyson
Michelle Frazier Trotman

Nationally, African American students are underrepresented in gifted education programs, and educators everywhere seek ways to identify more gifted Black students. This article addresses a central question in gifted education: How can we recruit **and** retain more African American students in our gifted programs? The authors review factors affecting the persistent underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education and offer suggestions for recruiting and retaining these able students. The authors' major premise is that a deficit orientation held by educators hinders access to gifted programs for diverse students. This thinking hinders the ability and willingness of educators to recognize the strengths of African American students. Too often, educators interpret differences as deficits, dysfunctions, and disadvantages; thus, many diverse students gain the "at risk" label. We contend that educators must move beyond a deficit orientation in order to recognize the strengths of African American students. Changing our thinking about differences among children holds great promise for recruiting and retaining culturally diverse students in gifted education.

Donna Y. Ford is a Professor in the Special Education program at The Ohio State University. Dr. Ford teaches courses in gifted education and conducts research on the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education. She also writes extensively on multicultural education and gifted underachievers. Donna is on the editorial board of the *Roeper Review* and consults with school districts nationally. **J. John Harris III** is a Professor of Education, specializing in educational administration and law. He also holds a position in the College of Arts and Science at the University of Kentucky. He and Donna Ford recently published *Multicultural Gifted Education* (1999). **Cynthia A. Tyson** is an Assistant Professor in the College of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University. She teaches courses in global, multicultural education and social studies education. Her research is in the areas of social justice and children's literature. **Michelle Frazier Trotman** is a doctoral student in the Special Education Program at The Ohio State University. She is a former special education teacher and coach in an urban public school system. Her primary interests are at-risk students and underachievement in urban settings.

Concern for the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs dates back to Jenkins' (1936) studies of Black students with high intelligence test scores who were not formally identified as gifted.[1] This lament has continued each decade since. For instance, in 1950, the Educational Policies Commission noted the tragic waste of Black talent:

> Lacking both incentive and opportunity, the probabilities are very great that, however superior one's gifts may be, he will rarely live a life of high achievement. Follow-up studies of highly gifted young Negroes, for instance, reveal a shocking waste of talent—a waste that adds an incalculable amount to the price of prejudice in this country (p. 33).

Even today, nearly a half-century since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) made school desegregation the law of the land, gifted African American students continue to be underidentified. Gifted education, too often, remains racially segregated, with students of color being underrepresented and underserved.

Harris and Ford's (1991) review of the literature revealed that fewer than 2% of the articles and scholarly publications focused on gifted minority learners. Ford (1998) conducted another search of articles in five gifted education journals between 1966 and 1996, and as Table 1 shows, she found that only 36 of 2,816 focused on Black students. Ford also found that the vast majority of that research and literature focused heavily on the recruitment (that is, the identification and assessment) of Black students for placement in gifted programs. Almost no attention focused on their retention, on strategies for ensuring that minority students experience success once identified and placed.

This article reviews the literature on the identification and placement (i.e., the recruitment) of Black students into programs for gifted learners. Our premise is that the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education extends beyond identification instruments and assessment processes, and that a "deficit perspective" exists whereby students of color who are culturally different from their white counterparts are viewed as culturally deprived or disadvantaged. This deficit perspective regarding cultural diversity keeps educators from recognizing the gifts and talents of African American students. Finally, we maintain that educators must aggressively seek ways both to recruit and to retain African American students in gifted education.

ERIC Search of Articles on Racially and Culturally Diverse Students in Selected Gifted Education Journals (1966 to 1996)

Journal	Total number of articles	Asian American students	Hispanic American students	American Indian students	African American students
Gifted Child Quarterly	781	1	2	2	4
Gifted Child Today	553	1	1	2	3
Journal for the Education of the Gifted	335	2	4	2	7
Roeper Review	876	2	2	3	16
Gifted Education International	271	0	0	0	6
TOTAL	2,816	6	9	9	36

Note: The searches were conducted using key words *gifted, gifted and minority, gifted and Black or African American, gifted and Hispanic, gifted and Indian,* and *gifted and Asian* (From "The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education: Problems and promises in recruitment and retention" by Donna Y. Ford, 1998, *The Journal of Special Education, 32,* p. 5. Copyright date by PRO-ED, Inc. Reprinted with permission.)

Table 1

[1] The terms "Black" and "African American" are used interchangeably in this article.

Recruitment and Retention Barriers

Recommendations regarding the identification and assessment of gifted Black students vary, but they emphasize the need to find alternative ways—more reliable and valid ways—to identify gifted Black students. These options include culturally sensitive instruments (e.g., nonverbal tests), multidimensional assessment strategies, and broader philosophies, definitions and theories of giftedness (Frasier, Garcia, & Passow, 1995; Frasier & Passow, 1994; Ford, 1996). Recognizing the loss of talent among diverse students not being identified as gifted, Congress (1988) passed legislation (i.e., Javits Act) to promote the interests of gifted students; its major goal is to support efforts to identify and serve minority and low socioeconomic status (SES) students. The legislation requires that about half of the funded projects serve low SES students. Moreover, in 1997, the National Association for Gifted Children published a position statement urging educators to use more than one test to make educational and placement decisions about gifted students, and to seek equity in their identification and assessment instruments, policies, and procedures.

Despite these initiatives, little has changed in the demographics of gifted education (or the practices and instruments used to identify gifted students, as discussed later). The most recent report on the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education, from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE, 1993), showed that gifted Black students were underrepresented by at least 50% nationally. As Table 2 indicates, little has changed in terms of percentages over the years. Black students and other minorities (with the exception of Asian Americans) remain notably absent from gifted programs. In fact, for some minority groups, the underrepresentation has actually increased (Ford, 1998).

Why does the underrepresentation of gifted African Americans persist? While a majority of commentators raise testing issues, we believe that the principal barrier to the recruitment and retention of African American students in gifted education is the pervasive deficit orientation that prevails in society and its educational institutions. After examining this orientation, we discuss *symptoms* of this orientation, such as the low referral rates of Black

Trends in the Representation of Minority Students in Gifted Education Programs from 1978 to 1992

Student Population	1978	1980	1982	1984	1992
Hispanic American	6.8 5.15 (u=25%)	9.0 5.4 (u=40%)	8.6 4.0 (u=53%)	13.2 7.2 (u=45%)	13.7 7.9 (u=42%)
American Indian	.8 .3 (u=62%)	.7 .3 (u=57%)	.5 .3 (u=40%)	.8 .3 (u=62%)	1.0 .5 (u=50%)
Asian American	1.4 3.4 (o=59%)	2.2 4.4 (o=50%)	2.6 4.7 (o=45%)	3.7 6.8 (o=46%)	4.0 7.0 (o=43%)
African American	15.7 10.3 (u=33%)	20.1 11.1 (u=45%)	25.8 11.0 (u=57%)	24.5 12.9 (u=47%)	21.1 12.0 (u=41%)

Notes: Percentages are rounded; top number indicates percentage of student population and middle number represents percentage of gifted education. "o" indicates overrepresentation; "u" indicates underrepresentation. Percentage of underrepresentation was calculated using the following formula: 1 - (percentage of gifted education program divided by percentage of school district). Source for 1978 to 1984 data: Chinn & Hughes (1987). Source for 1992 data: OCR Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report (1992).

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Table 2

students for gifted education services, and the heavy reliance on tests that inadequately capture the strengths and cultural orientations of Black students.

Deficit Ideologies: Limiting Access and Opportunity

The less we know about each other, the more we make up.

Reactions to differences among students manifest themselves in various ways, and they exert a powerful influence in educational settings. Boykin (1994) and others have studied the cultural styles of African American students, noting such characteristics as verve, mobility, oral tradition, communalism, spirituality, and affect. As Table 3 illustrates, deficit thinking can exacerbate misunderstandings of these cultural characteristics. For example, verve and movement (tactile and kinesthetic preferences) may be (mis)interpreted as hyperactivity; an affective orientation may be (mis)interpreted as immaturity, irrationality, and low cognitive ability; and communalism may be (mis)interpreted as social dependency and immaturity (also see Ford, Howard, Harris, & Tyson, 2000).

Ideas about racial backgrounds influence the development of definitions, policies, and practices designed to deal with differences. For instance, Gould (1981, 1995) and Menchaca (1997) noted that deficit thinking contributed to past (and no doubt, current) beliefs about ethnicity and intelligence. Gould lead readers back two centuries to demonstrate how *a priori* assumptions and fears associated with different ethnic groups, particularly African American Ameri-

cans, led to conscious fraud—dishonest and prejudicial research methods, deliberate miscalculations, convenient omissions, and data misinterpretation among scientists studying intelligence. These early assumptions and practices gave way to the prevailing belief that human races could be ranked in a linear scale of mental worth, as evidenced by Cyril Burt's, Paul Broca's, and Samuel Morten's research on craniometry (Gould, 1981, p. 86).

Later, as school districts faced increasing ethnic and racial diversity (often attributable to immigration), educators resorted to increased reliance on standardized tests–biased[2] standardized tests–which almost guaranteed low test scores for immigrants and culturally diverse groups who were unfamiliar with U.S. customs, traditions, values, norms, and language. As Gould (1995), Hilliard (1992), and others noted, the tests measured familiarity with American culture and English proficiency, not intelligence. In this respect, intelligence testing became a theory of limits for diverse populations (Gould, 1995). Gould (1981) likened current intelligence testing practices to the historical practices of craniology and craniometry: "The misuse of mental tests is not inherent in the idea of testing itself. It arises primarily from two fallacies, eagerly embraced by those who wish to use tests for the maintenance of social ranks and distinctions" (p. 155).

Menchaca (1997) made a similar observation:

Racial differences in intelligence, it was contended, are most validly explained by

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[2] Many scholars now acknowledge that the older tests were biased but maintain that current, revised tests are bias-free.

Possible Misinterpretations of Cultural Orientations		
Characteristic	**Description**	**Possible Misinterpretation**
Oral Tradition	Strong preference for oral modes of communication; students speak frankly, directly, and honestly; students enjoy playing with language (puns, jokes, innuendoes, storytelling, etc.).	Frankness and bluntness may be perceived as rudeness and lacking in social skills. Creative language may not be appreciated; if students speak Black English vernacular, they may be considered less intelligent.
Movement and Verve	A strong need to be actively involved, mobile; psychomotor preferences.	Student may be viewed as hyperactive, inattentive, and immature.
Communalism	Interdependence; preference for social or group learning; dislike for individual competitiveness.	The desire to work with others may be perceived as immaturity, lacking independence, and even cheating!
Affective	Expresses self easily with emotions; feeling oriented.	Student may be perceived as too emotional and immature; may be considered weak in cognitive skills.

Table 3

racial differences in innate, genetically determined abilities. What emerged from these findings, regarding schooling, were curricular modifications ensuring that the "intellectually inferior" and the social order would best be served by providing these students concrete, low-level, segregated instruction commensurate with their alleged diminished intellectual abilities (p. 38).

The deficit orientation was recently revived by the publication of *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Seeking to influence public and social policy, Herrnstein and Murray interpreted (or misinterpreted and misrepresented) their data, like those of earlier centuries, so as to confirm prejudices. As Gould (1981) noted, the hereditarian theory of IQ is a home-grown American product that persists in current practices of testing, sorting, and discarding.

Menchaca (1997) also traced the evolution of deficit thinking, and demonstrated how it influenced segregation in schools (e.g., *Plessy v. Fergusen*, 1896) and resistance to desegregation during the Civil Rights era and today. For instance, some scholars conclude that educators continue to resist desegregation, and they use tracking and ability grouping to resegregate students racially (e.g., Oakes, 1985; Slavin, 1987). That is, some educators argue that the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education (and their overrepresentation in special education) relate strongly to efforts to perpetuate school segregation (e.g., Ford & Webb, 1995; Hilliard, 1992).

In the sections that follow, we discuss how deficit orientations influence, directly and indirectly, a myriad of gifted education practices and, specifically, limits access to gifted edu-

cation for diverse students. This information presents a synopsis of critical issues related to the recruitment and retention of Black students in gifted education. The list is far from exhaustive; instead, it presents an overview of seven major symptoms of deficit thinking:
(1) traditional IQ-based definitions, philosophies, and theories of giftedness;
(2) identification practices and policies that have a disproportionately negative impact on Black students (e.g., a reliance on teacher referral for initial screening);
(3) a lack of training aimed at helping educators in the area of gifted education;
(4) a lack of training aimed at helping teachers understand and interpret standardized test results;
(5) inadequate training of teachers and other school personnel in multicultural education;
(6) inadequate efforts to communicate with Black families and communities about gifted education; and
(7) Black students' decisions to avoid gifted education programs.

Testing and Assessment Issues
The use of tests to identify and assess students is, of course, pervasive in gifted education. Test scores play a dominant role in identification and placement decisions. For example, a study by VanTassel-Baska, Patton, and Prillaman (1989) revealed that 88.5% of states rely primarily on standardized, norm-referenced tests to identify gifted students, including those from economically and culturally diverse groups. More than 90% of school districts use these test scores (Colangelo & Davis, 1997; Davis & Rimm, 1997). This near-exclusive reliance on test scores for placement decisions keeps the demographics of gifted programs resolutely

White and middle class. While traditional intelligence tests, more or less, effectively identify and assess White students, they have been less effective with African American students. This raises the question: Why do we continue to use these tests so exclusively and extensively? Educators can choose from at least three explanations for the poor test performance of Black students: (1) the fault rests within the test (e.g., test bias); (2) the fault rests with the educational environment (e.g., poor instruction and lack of access to high quality education contributes to poor test scores); or (3) the fault rests with (or within) the student (e.g., he/she is cognitively inferior or "culturally deprived").

Educators who select the first two viewpoints would feel an obligation to make substantive changes in assessment and educational practices. These views consider the influence of the environment on test performance. However, the last explanation rests in deficit thinking. It is an example of blaming the victim. Educators who support this view abdicate any responsibility for minority students' lower test scores (see Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Jensen, 1981; Rushton & Ankney, 2000) because of the belief that genetics determines intelligence, and that intelligence is static.

IQ-based definitions and theories. Little agreement exists among educators regarding how best to define the terms "intelligent" or "gifted." Cassidy and Hossler (1992) found that most states continue to follow the 1978 (or older) federal definition of gifted. They use either the 1978 federal definition outright or a modification; 30 states had made no definitional revisions in at least a decade; and only 15 states had made revisions between 1987 and 1992. Essentially, most states continue to define giftedness unidimensionally—as a function of high IQ scores. IQ or test-

driven definitions are effective at identifying middle-class White students, but can ignore those students who: (a) perform poorly on paper-and-pencil tasks conducted in artificial or lab-like settings; (b) do not perform well on culturally loaded tests (e.g., Helms, 1992; Kaufman, 1994); (c) have learning and/or cognitive styles that are different from White students (e.g., Hilliard, 1989; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997); (d) have test anxiety (Ford, 1995); or (e) have low achievement motivation (e.g., Ford, 1996; Wechsler, 1991).

Inadequate Policies and Practices. Procedural and policy issues also contribute to the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education. Specifically, teachers systematically under-refer minority students for gifted education services (e.g., Ford, 1995; Saccuzzo, Johnson, & Guertin, 1994). Ford found many Black students in her study who had high test scores, but were underrepresented in gifted education because teachers did not refer them for screening. In other words, when teacher referral is the first (or only) recruitment step, gifted Black students are likely to be underrepresented. To repeat, perceptions have a powerful influence on our behaviors and decisions, as explained in Table 3.

Lack of multicultural preparation among teachers. Few preservice teachers receive exposure to multicultural educational experiences, multicultural curriculum and instruction, and internships and practicum in urban settings, etc. (see Banks & Banks, 1995). At institutions of higher education, most students graduate with a monocultural or ethnocentric curriculum that ill prepares them to work with culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students. They, consequently, misunderstand cultural differences among diverse students relative to learning styles, communication styles, and behavioral styles. Educators may perceive these differences as deficits, as Table 3 illustrates.

Several researchers have found learning and cognitive styles common among Black children (e.g., Hale-Benson, 1986; Hilliard, 1992; Shade et al., 1997). Specifically, teachers should be aware that Black students tend to be concrete learners, social learners, field-dependent learners, and learners who value constructive responses to their work. These differences hold numerous implications for the identification of gift-

ed Black students. Namely, the extent to which Black students are global versus analytical learners, visual versus auditory, highly mobile versus static, and less peer-oriented versus more peer-oriented affects their learning, achievement, motivation, and school performance.

Inadequate teacher preparation in gifted education. Ford (1999) recently surveyed minority teachers about their decisions to enter the field of gifted education, general education, or special education. Many teachers reported having little exposure to gifted education in their teacher preparation programs, and most teachers, including those who held degrees in special education, lacked any formal preparation in gifted education. This lack of preparation in and sensitivity to the characteristics of gifted students, a lack of understanding of the social and emotional needs of gifted students, and a lack of attention to underachievement among gifted students[3], all hinder teachers' abilities to make fair and equitable referrals. The data, in short, indicate that teachers who lack preparation in gifted education are ineffective at identifying gifted students (see Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985). Teachers unprepared to work with gifted students may retain stereotypes and misperceptions that undermine their ability to recognize strengths in students who behave differently from their expectations. Teachers often use the behaviors of White students as the norm by which to compare Black students.

Inadequate teacher preparation in testing and assessment. Since teachers take direct responsibility for providing services to gifted students based on assessed needs, they require formal preparation in testing and assessment, but many teachers with whom we have worked had never seen a *WISC-III, Otis-Lennon School Abilities Test*, or any of the other tests frequently used to guide identification and placement decisions, nor could they reliably interpret intelligence and achievement test scores. Teachers lacking assessment preparation are not likely to provide high-quality gifted education services.

Moreover, teachers must understand the impact of culture on test scores in order to interpret the scores meaningfully. They must understand how culturally loaded tests can hinder minority students' test scores. Given that Black students tend to score lower on IQ and

achievement tests than White students, how can teachers interpret and use test scores responsibly? What explanations can they give for the differential test scores? What alternative instruments and assessment practices can they adopt? Our field must respond to these questions, and prepare teachers who are competent in the area of testing and assessment.

Inadequate communication with Black families and communities. Much careful research indicates that active family involvement in the educational process enhances student achievement. Karnes, Shwedel, and Steinberg (1984) noted that 90% of the parents of gifted students they surveyed involved themselves directly in their children's education. Likewise, Scott-Jones (1987) and Clark (1983) found that academically successful Black students had mothers who provided more books, set clearer academic goals for their children, and were more deeply involved in schoolwork than Black parents whose children were less successful.

If a deficit orientation is present among educators, they may not communicate with minority families about gifted education services and other opportunities. Further, if this orientation is present, Black parents would view schools with suspicion and doubt educators' commitment to diverse children. Such parents are unlikely to involve themselves in school settings because of the belief that they are not valued as a resource and member of the school community.

Black students' decisions not to participate in gifted education. Perhaps the worst consequence of deficit thinking among educators is the impact it has on the social-emotional and psychological development of Black students. Research by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and others (e.g., Ford, 1993; Fordham, 1988; Steele, 1997; Suskind, 1998) reveals that many gifted or high achieving Black students internalize deficit-thinking orientations. Many highly able Black students question their own abilities and then sabotage their own achievement. For example, some Black students assume the role of class clown or athlete to hide their academic abilities and achievements, and they refuse to participate in accelerated or gifted education programs. These students may also succumb to negative pressures to avoid achievement, particularly from their peers; and they come to associate or equate academic achievement with

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[3] Teachers are often surprised to find gifted students underachieving. They equate giftedness with achievement and productivity; they believe that gifted students "should" have high grades because their IQ or achievement test scores are high. Concomitantly, when students with low test scores are doing well, teachers report that these students are "overachieving," but are not gifted. Of course, gifted students can have low test scores for a number of reasons.

"acting White." Further, Steele found that the test performance of Black students can be hindered by what he calls "stereotype threat" in which Black students are overcome by anxiety during test-taking situations such that their performance suffers. Thus, gifted African American students may underachieve deliberately, refuse to be assessed for gifted education services, and refuse placement in gifted programs.

Recommendations for Change: Beyond Deficit Ideologies

"Schools must eliminate barriers to the participation of economically disadvantaged and minority students in services for students with outstanding talents... and must develop strategies to serve students from underrepresented groups" (USDE, 1993, p. 28).

To recruit and retain African American students in gifted education more effectively, educators must, clearly, shed deficit thinking. This attitudinal or philosophical change increases the probability that educators will adopt contemporary theories and definitions of giftedness, use culturally sensitive instruments, identify and serve gifted underachievers, provide all their students with a multicultural education, provide all staff members with multicultural preparation, and seek strong home-school partnerships. (See Table 4.)

Adopt Contemporary Theories and Definitions

A number of theories of intelligence and giftedness exist, but two appear to capture the strengths, abilities, and promise of gifted Black learners. Sternberg's (1985) Triarchic Theory of Intel-

ligence proposes that intelligence reveals itself in at least three ways: componentially, experientially, and contextually. Componential learners are analytical and abstract thinkers who do well on standardized tests and in school. Experiential learners value creativity and enjoy novelty. They dislike rules and follow few of their own; they see rules as inconveniences meant to be broken. Contextual learners readily adapt to their environments (a skill IQ tests fail to measure). They are street-smart survivors, socially competent and practical, but they may do poorly in school.

Gardner (1983) distinguished among seven types of intelligences—linguistics, logical-mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily kinesthetic, spatial, and musical—each of which entails distinct forms of perception, memory, and other psychological processes. In his Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Gardner defined intelligence as the ability to solve problems or to fashion products valued in one or more cultural settings.

These two broad and comprehensive, flexible and inclusive theories contend that giftedness is a social construct that manifests itself in many ways and means different things for different cultural groups. The theorists acknowledge the multifaceted, complex nature of intelligence and how current tests (which are too simplistic and static) fail to do justice to this construct. In addition, the USDE's (1993) most recent definition of gifted also broadens notions of giftedness:

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).

The italicized passages should resonate among those responsible for recruiting Black students into gifted education. First, the notion of talent development is a major focus of the definition. It recognizes that many students are diamonds in the rough who have had inadequate opportunities to develop and perform at high academic levels. For example, some gifted Black students, especially those who live in poverty, may lack exposure to books and other literature, they may not visit libraries or bookstores, and they miss out on other meaningful educational experiences.[4] The definition also recognizes that some students face more barriers in life than others, including discrimination.

The inclusion of "potential" in the federal definition appears to recognize an obligation to serve those students who have, for whatever reasons, yet to manifest their abilities. These students may include underachievers, minority youngsters, economically disadvantaged students, and students with special education needs. Finally, the definition wisely reminds educators that giftedness exists among all sociodemographic groups—even among poor children.

Suggestions for Change: *From Traditional to Contemporary Beliefs and Practices*

Gifted Education Considerations	Traditional Beliefs and Practices	Contemporary Beliefs and Practices
Focus of testing	Focus solely on identification, which does not suggest how to meet students' needs.	Focus on assessment that is diagnostic and prescriptive.
Emphasis on testing	One test is sufficient to identify gifted students. One number (IQ or achievement test score) identifies gifted students. The best measure of giftedness is a test.	Giftedness is multidimensional; therefore, multiple methods (qualitative and quantitative) are used, and information is gathered from multiple sources (teachers, parents, community members, etc.). No "one size fits all" test exists.
Perception about giftedness and test scores	Giftedness is equated with a high IQ or achievement score. A cutoff score determines giftedness.	The limitations of test scores are recognized, especially among culturally diverse students. Gifted students can have low test scores.
Views about ability and effort	Ability is rewarded; students must demonstrate their ability.	Effort is valued and rewarded. Educators recognize that high quality educational experiences can help students reach their potential.

Table 4

[4] Accordingly, the federal definition recognizes that students coming from high SES homes are likely to have such opportunities, which is likely to contribute to the demonstration of their giftedness.

Use Culturally Sensitive Instruments

To date, the most promising instruments for assessing the strengths of Black students are such nonverbal tests of intelligence as the *Naglieri Non-Verbal Abilities Test* and *Raven's Matrix Analogies Tests*, which are considered less culturally loaded than traditional tests (see Kaufman, 1994; Saccuzzo et al., 1994). Accordingly, these are more likely to capture the cognitive strengths of Black students. Saccuzzo et al., for instance, identified substantively 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). They went on to state 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).

Educators should understand that 'nonverbal' tests assess intelligence nonverbally. This is not to say that students are "nonverbal"; rather, the tests give students opportunities to demonstrate their intelligence without the confounding influence of language, vocabulary, and academic exposure.

Identify and Serve Gifted Underachievers

Philosophical differences persist over the goals of gifted education and the types of gifted students to serve. Some philosophies specify that gifted students be both gifted and productive. Thus, giftedness becomes equated with achievement or demonstrated performance, and gifted education services become a privilege and opposed to a need. 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 fall below a certain level. When one equates giftedness with high achievement (itself a relative term), gifted underachievers will go unrecruited and/or unretained. Given the reality that many Black students underachieve in schools, they are destined to go unidentified, and their needs will be unrecognized and unmet.

Provide Multicultural Preparation for Educators

With forecasts projecting a growing minority student population, teachers will have to bear a greater responsibility for demonstrating multicultural competence (Ford, Grantham, & Harris, 1998;

Ford & Harris, 1999; Ford et al., 2000). Multicultural education preparation among all school personnel—teachers, counselors, psychologists, administrators, and support staff–may increase the recruitment and retention of Black students in gifted education. This preparation, which focuses proactively on individual differences and cultural diversity, must permeate educational and professional development experiences. Comprehensive preparation should center on re-educating school personnel so that deficit-oriented philosophies no longer impede Black students' access to gifted education. To become more culturally competent, educators must:
(1) engage in critical self-examination that explores their attitudes and perceptions concerning cultural diversity, and the influence of these attitudes and perceptions on minority students' achievement and educational opportunities;
(2) acquire accurate information about various cultural groups (e.g., histories, historical and contemporary contributions, and their preferred learning styles);
(3) learn how to infuse multicultural perspectives and materials into curriculum and instruction so as to maximize the academic, cognitive, social-emotional, and cultural development of students; and
(4) build partnerships with diverse families, communities, and organizations.

Provide a Multicultural Education for Gifted Students

Many scholars emphasize the need for all students to have a multicultural education (e.g., Banks, 1999; Ford, 1998; Ford et al., 1998; Ford & Harris, 1999). Using a mirror as an analogy, we contend that students must see themselves reflected and affirmed in the curriculum. Specifically, at minimum,
- books and curricular materials must be culturally diverse;
- teachers must modify teaching and instructional strategies to accommodate culturally influenced learning styles;
- social and cultural issues/topics must integrate the curriculum;
- concepts and issues must be examined from multiple perspectives; and
- a focus on excellence and equity must be evident in policies and practices.

Ford and Harris (1999) and Ford et al. (2000) provide numerous strategies and materials to help educators as they select multicultural materials and resources, and as they design multicultural experiences for gifted students.

Develop Home-School Partnerships

In theory, school districts consider family involvement central to student achievement. In practice, few schools consistently and aggressively build partnerships with Black families (Ford, 1996). During the first week of school and constantly thereafter, teachers and administrators must make sure that African American families know that the school district offers gifted education services, that they understand referral and screening measures and procedures, and they know how the placement decisions are made. Just as important, Black families must understand the purposes and benefits of gifted education. Efforts by schools must be aggressive and proactive; school personnel will need to go into the Black community (e.g., visit homes), attend minority-sponsored events, and seek the support of minority churches and corporations in order to build home-school partnerships.

Equally important, efforts should focus on family education—holding workshops and meetings designed to educate diverse parents regarding how to meet the needs of and advocate for their gifted children. As Ford (1996) noted, Black parents need strategies for helping their children to cope with peer pressures and social injustices, maintaining achievement, and staying motivated and goal-oriented. Essentially, Black families must have strategies to be effective advocates for their children in school settings.

Proactively Evaluating Gifted Education

The success schools achieve at recruiting and retaining Black students in gifted education depends heavily on critical self-examination and a willingness to move beyond deficit thinking. One can use the recommendations below to assess the quality of gifted programs and the extent to which these programs embody principles of diversity and equity (see Ford, 1996; Ford & Harris, 1999; Ford, et al., 2000).

First, the school district should examine its philosophy of gifted education and its definition of giftedness. More specifically, its philosophy and definition need to be inclusive. Second, assessment instruments and practices must be equitable—the measures must be valid and reliable for diverse students, and ethnic, cultural, and gender biases in the selection process should be eliminated.

Third, students in the gifted program should closely represent the community's demographics. That is, students of diverse backgrounds should be equitably represented according to criteria such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The reasons for the disparities must be evaluated and decreased. Similarly, there should be evidence of increasing diversity among professionals in the gifted program.

Fourth, the school district should provide opportunities for continuing professional development in gifted and multicultural education. More specifically, faculty members and other school personnel must be encouraged and given opportunities by administrators to participate in workshops, conferences, university courses, and so forth. Likewise, there must be a library for teachers and students that contains up-to-date multicultural resources (e.g., newsletters, journals, and books).

Fifth, there should be mechanisms that assess and address the affective and psychological needs of minority students (e.g., social and emotional needs, racial identity, environmental and risk factors). Sixth, schools will need to examine how and how much families are involved in the formal learning process. African American families need to be encouraged to become and remain involved. Efforts to create home-school partnerships should be ongoing.

Seventh, curriculum and instruction need to be grounded in multiculturalism. The curriculum needs to pluralistic (i.e., does it reflect diversity relative to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other sociodemographic variables?). The curriculum should provide genuine options for all students to understand diverse cultures. Finally, policies should be in place to support multiculturalism and diversity. More specifically, published policies regarding multiculturalism are needed and school personnel must be held accountable for implementing these policies.

Summary

Controversy exists regarding the reasons that Black students are underrepresented in gifted education. The controversy focuses on whether the causes include deficiencies in the children and their families, or discriminatory practices of schools and society that restrict the search for, and discovery of, minority talent. As we have argued, decisions about giftedness are never more than predictions; therefore, wide nets should

be thrown to increase the power of those predictions. We should err on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion (e.g., Passow & Frasier, 1996).

The persistent and pervasive underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education is a tragedy. Black students are unidentified as gifted for many reasons. Accordingly, they receive an inappropriate education. We can attribute much of the difficulty to the deficit thinking that persists in education because deficit thinking limits access and opportunity. One can, however, take proactive and aggressive steps to rectify this mindset and its consequences. For instance, designing, adapting, modifying, and extending instruments, strategies, and procedures that take into account the influence of ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status on behavior improves greatly upon traditional identification approaches (Passow & Frasier, 1996, p. 201). The ultimate challenge is to create paradigms that take culture and context into account to enhance possibilities for diverse students. As an ad for the United Negro College Fund says, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." Should deficit thinking orientations continue, many more gifted Black students will atrophy in their schools, and their schools will be at fault. A mind is also a terrible thing to erase.

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