

Ignorance or Indifference? Seeking Excellence and Equity for Under-Represented Students of Color in Gifted Education

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Abstract

Lack of access to gifted education is prevalent, yet preventable for Black and Hispanic students. Years of data from the Office for Civil Rights and national reports reveal that deficit thinking, prejudice, and discrimination must be at work, thus compromising the educational experiences of gifted students of color. In this article, the authors share data on under-representation in the U.S., along with contributing factors and recommendations. They rail against both ignorance and indifference explanations, calling instead for accountability and deliberate efforts to desegregate gifted education with both excellence and equity as the driving force. We define equity as being fair, responsive, and impartial, especially for those who have the fewest resources and least advocacy, and who have experienced structural inequality due to historical exclusion. We hope readers will learn from the U.S. context and use that which is relevant for their nation's context.

Keywords

Gifted education, under-representation, students of color, Black students, Hispanic/Latino students, equity

Introduction

While U.S. schools have become more diverse today than at any other point in our nation's history, students of color in general, African American and Hispanic students in particular, continue to be concentrated in racially and economically homogenous schools where access and opportunity to gifted education, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses are limited and

virtually nonexistent (Ford, 2013a, 2013b; Orfield & Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014; Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012). AP is a program in the United States and Canada by the College Board; the classes offer college-level curricula and examinations to high school

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students. American colleges and universities may grant placement and course credit to students who obtain high scores on the examinations (see <https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/apcourse> for a detailed description of AP classes and offering). The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. The organization works with schools, and governmental and international organizations to develop challenging programs of international education and rigorous assessment. These programs encourage students around the globe to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand other people from different backgrounds (see <http://www.ibo.org/en/about-the-ib/facts-and-figures/>).

This persistent school segregation, we argue, limits access and opportunity to gifted education, AP, and IB courses and is a direct reflection of historical and contemporary residential segregation (Lipsitz, 1998). This said, the motivation to desegregate schools, specifically gifted education, advanced classes and, by extension, neighborhoods is hobbled by *Genesis Amnesia* (from Pierre Bourdieu as cited in Ogilvie, 2004), a concept and practice that explains how, especially in regard to Indigenous and colonized peoples, we often forget the beginning.

As in the case for Indigenous and colonized peoples' histories, there is also stubborn ignorance regarding our nation's racial history with respect to the practice of schools and testing to rank and sort individuals based on perceived talent and ability (e.g., Gould, 1981). Evidence of this historical and conventional ignorance or indifference can be found in de

facto explanations that suggest segregated schools (neighborhoods) are an accident of economic circumstances, demographic trends, personal preferences, and private discrimination (Lipman, 2011; Lipsitz, 1998). Similar logic that ignores evidence to the contrary is the Eugenics movement (e.g., Galton, 1883; Herrnstein and Murray; 1994) that convinced some professionals and laypersons to accept the ideology that being *well-born* and highly intelligent are characteristics possessed only by a select number of people. This movement and ideology have not only been used to justify the unequal allocation of a quality education to students of different races, but also to protect gifted education for a relatively small number of students -- namely White and middle class. Reliance on IQ (intelligence quotient) and testing continue unabated, to some extent, to support these assumptions and practices (see Fischer et al., 1996; Ford, 2013b).

In an attempt to interrupt this ignorance and/or indifference in order to achieve excellence and equity for under-represented students of color in gifted education, we challenge past and present hegemonic ways of knowledge production, validation, and dissemination that gives currency and legitimacy to certain racial groups as "naturally" having gifts and talents. Guided by this view, our intent of this article to challenge and dislodge the notion that measured intelligence used as the primary or exclusive criteria for identification and entrance into gifted education is neither equitable nor indicative of best practices, which focus on comprehensive assessment, rather than testing. Instead of using limited measures of students' ability and sorting students accordingly -- separating the gifted from the giftless -- we argue that schools must recognize, validate, and cultivate potential, talent, and

ability in all students in general, and students of color in particular. To do the latter is to make a concerted effort to challenge the ignorance and indifference surrounding this coveted educational and social space to achieve excellence and equity for under-represented students of color in gifted education. The diversification of such educational opportunities would afford students of color a just opportunity to fully develop their unique talents and skills, while expanding common notions of what it means to be gifted.

We define and discuss the terms ignorant and indifference with respect to gifted education (and, by extension, AP and IB classes), followed by a discussion of gifted education as virtually a White space reserved for a select few intelligent students. Next, we present an overview of the under-representation of students of color in gifted education as documented by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR). We then discuss the impact of these data regarding equitable opportunities for non-White students gaining access to gifted education. Finally, we offer a set of recommendations for achieving excellence and equity in gifted education.

Demystifying Ignorance and Indifference in Gifted Education

Ignorance can sometimes be characterized by a lack of knowledge and described as a state of being uninformed (see Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005). However, not knowing by choice or circumstance does not necessarily mean an inability to learn or to know. Based on this definition, ignorance is not necessarily a steady condition. There are those who emerge from ignorance into a space of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. That is, ignorance can be overcome and revised - just as attitudes,

beliefs, and practices regarding who is in possession of gifts and talents across race, class, and gender can be challenged. While sometimes misinterpreted and equated with stupidity, ignorance is not necessarily synonymous with a lack of education, wisdom, intelligence, competence, or knowledge. As discussed previously, segregated schools and, by extension, segregated neighborhoods are not mere examples of ignorance, but an active racial steering practice borne out of slavery and Jim Crow. Per Allport's (1954) degrees of prejudice, one must distinguish between avoidance and discrimination. White flight, which can be seen in the creation of suburbs and gifted programs, is one example of avoidance that results in segregated communities and programs. People are entitled to live where they choose; however, creating policies, procedures, and laws that do not allow people of color to live in suburbs and to participate in certain programs can be tantamount to discrimination. Thus, to ignore is to be ignorant and to be ignorant is to engage in an active and sometimes intentionally conscious state of not paying attention (e.g., Genesis Amnesia) in order to maintain the status quo (social order). In summary, ignorance is not a stagnant construct, but rather a mental state perpetuated by choice and/or circumstance.

Indifference, on the other hand, is apathy. It is a psychological situation centered on a lack of compassion, sympathy, empathy, or concern. Indifference, in relation to the under-representation of students of color in gifted education, highlights a persistent lack of concern, despite the preponderance of evidence to the contrary that demonstrates inequity in the referral and identification process of those from under-represented groups notwithstanding issues pertaining to retention (see Ford, 2013a, 2013b; Ford, 2015). Unchecked indifference has

the potential to encourage individuals to remain distant from a situation, challenge, conflict, or confrontation, not caring, in this case, that there has historically been and continues to be limited racial diversity in gifted education programs in U.S. schools. We assert, therefore, that to be indifferent to this persistent lack of equitable access and opportunity to gifted education is to engage in an active and conscious state of aloofness and inattention in order to maintain the status quo.

Taken together, ignorance and indifference seem to bleed into one another; however, when one considers the kind of ignorance associated with under-represented students of color in gifted education in U.S. schools, it is not necessarily the unconscious kind, “thought of as a gap in knowledge, as an epistemic oversight that easily could be remedied once it has been noticed” (Sullivan & Turana, 2007, p. 1). While this kind of ignorance exists in abundance, there is the manufactured ignorance (conscious) that we argue is not simply based on innocent gaps in knowledge, rather it is an example of ignorance “actively produced for purposes of domination and exploitation” (p. 1). Exclusion can be added to this manufactured ignorance. This kind of ignorance, we contend, has little to do with a simple lack of knowledge, emptiness or even a passive state; rather, it is situated and situational with historical roots in the Eugenics movement that protected intentional negligence with respect to historically marginalized groups. This kind of historical ignorance and indifference brings us to the unpacking of this *invisible* [and we argue, *visible*] *backpack of White privilege* (McIntosh, 1988) with regard to the poor referral and identification process of under-represented groups in gifted education.

In the sections that follow, we provide various examples of ignorance and indifference and some ways in which they have been constructed and perpetuated in gifted education. This active production of ignorance and indifference explained herein has been maintained for the sole purpose of keeping gifted education as a relative White space. A space that refuses to allow under-represented groups access to the spectrum of gifted education programs (see Ford, 2013a; Ford, 2015). Moreover, this active production of ignorance and indifference supported by a system of inequitable institutional practices has been strategically used to protect the ignorance and indifference of the racially privileged and by extension giving them a license to remain ignorant, oblivious, and arrogant regarding who belongs in gifted education programs.

Black Faces and White Spaces

Gifted education programs, as alluded to previously, have long been a White space -- over-enrolled by White students, taught by White teachers, and protected by White middle class parents (Kohn, 1998; Sapon-Shevin, 1996). Historically, advocates for greater numbers of Black and Brown faces in gifted and advanced programs have been confronted by White power brokers or establishments that view *difference* as a *deficit* and uphold biased views of intelligence that maintain the White enrollment status quo (Baldwin, 1987; Frasier, 1987; Hilliard, 1990; Torrance, 1974). The numbers reveal the magnitude of segregated gifted programs under the guise of ignorance as opposed to indifference.

Since 2002, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has collected data on school districts as documented in its Civil Rights Data Collection

(www.ocrdata.ed.gov). Each year, the OCR has found that Black and Hispanic students are under-represented in gifted education. The most recent OCR data collection was during the 2011-2012 school year in which, Black students comprised 19% of students enrolled in public schools across the country but only 10% of Black students were identified as gifted. This is equivalent to almost a 50% discrepancy. While representing 25% of students, Hispanic students comprise only 16% of students in gifted classes, roughly a 40% discrepancy. This equates to the under-education of approximately 500,000 Hispanic and Black students. The wide disparity of under-representation is not new to gifted education. Rather, this has become indicative of gifted educational spaces. One is hard pressed to find a district where under-representation does not exist, yet it is protected under so-called ignorance and, thus, deemed to be unintentional. Regardless of whether the school enrollment is majority Black, Hispanic, or mixed race, gifted education programs represent a White space in public schools, akin to segregation. The remnants of these segregated spaces are echoed in secondary classrooms (i.e., AP and IB classes) and beyond (e.g., colleges and universities, employment opportunities).

According to the U.S. Department of Education and the Office of Civil Rights, the pipeline to AP and IB classes and elite colleges is also racially segregated. This is problematic because these spaces are often filled by students with access to gifted programs. OCR data reveal that AP and IB classes are extensively White (see <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/StateNationalEstimation>) Consequently, opportunities to enroll in AP classes are limited and end up being racially identifiable. Teachers and counselors are school level gatekeepers because they operate with relative autonomy. As a result, equitable access

and opportunity for under-represented students are hindered due to teacher and counselor biases, ignorance, indifference, or all three. This is habitually manifested in under-referrals and “well-intentioned” discouragement when Black and Hispanic students express interest. Ford, Grantham, and Whiting’s (2008) review found that all studies examining teacher referrals to gifted programs revealed under-referrals of Black and Hispanic students and over-referrals of White students. Grissom and Redding (2016) found that even when Black students have the same profile as White students, White teachers still under-refer them. This pervasive pattern begs the question -- is this ignorance or indifference on the part of educators who have the authority to refer, who have the power to open or close doors to gifted education, IB and AP classes, and related opportunities?

Racial steering of White middle-class students into gifted education (and AP and IB) is supported by narrow definitions of giftedness based primarily on IQ scores and traditional theories of normative development based on high-income Whites that subvert the promise, potential, and possibility of Black students, especially boys, being referred to gifted education (Wright, Ford, & Walters, 2016). As a result of these definitions and traditions (most of which have not been culturally responsive), the strengths and cultural assets of non-White students that tend to manifest in their attitudes, beliefs, values, and practices go unrecognized and unsupported in school as a viable pathway to gifted education (Ford, 2010, 2013a, 2013b). Despite unique and brilliant experiential and cultural funds of knowledge, Black and Brown faces are denied access to gifted spaces, as noted below.

Access Denied: Students of Color and Gifted Education

A closer look at the contextual factors mentioned above, as these intersect with race in relationship to the significant under-representation of students of color in gifted education, raises two important questions: (1) how do race and culture directly impact students' access to learning opportunities in a racially stratified society? And (2) what are ways in which schools and individual teachers can deny or limit students of color access to gifted education and advanced curricular materials? These and other questions are explored in the remaining sections of this article. Sample strategies and resources grounded in equity and excellence are provided to increase students of color access to gifted education. To repeat, we define equity as being fair, responsive, and impartial, especially for those who have the fewest resources and least advocacy, and who have experienced structural inequality due to historical exclusion. We also provide a formula designed to quantify equity, in order to highlight these inequities.

Gifted Education Definitions and a Perspective on Culture

Between 1970 and 2001, the U.S. Department of Education adopted six definitions of giftedness. However, the only explicit mention of culture within these six definitions does not appear until 1993. This early mention of culture was colorblind because it failed to capture complexity in a non-essentializing way. Thus, the absence of the nuances and complexities of culture in definitions of giftedness is cause for concern when consideration is given to the belief that culture is fundamental to understanding learning and development (Banks, 2001; Lee,

2007; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Nieto, 2009). For example, research on the achievement and learning of students of color tends to define culture as a system of meanings and practices, cohesive across time, which individual members carry with them from place to place (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Young & Young, 2016). The problem with this view of culture is that it characterizes individuals as somewhat passive carriers of culture. Based on this view, culture is simply a set of rituals, beliefs, and fixed traits. Such an operational definition of culture contrasts with the concept of culture used to describe and explain the gifts and talents of under-represented populations that often go unnoticed in schools. Culture with respect to gifted education is produced and reproduced in moments as people do life. From this standpoint, culture is both carried by individuals and created in moment-to-moment interactions with one another as they participate in (and reconstruct) cultural practices. This more fluid definition of culture is requisite to the current discussion.

Drawing on this conceptualization of culture, we assert and concur that gifted students are children and youth who possess 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. Further, we submit that giftedness is multifaceted, as are the solutions to increasing access. 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 typically provided by schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all

areas of human endeavor (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). This culturally responsive definition of giftedness is essential to the diversification and desegregation of gifted classrooms.

In light of the claim put forth by the U.S. Department of Education, an emphasis on potential and talent development is both critically necessary and equitable in every nation. Talent development – the focus on early identification and potential, and ongoing supports – has the capacity to recruit and retain under-represented gifted students. The culturally responsive 1993 definition addressed two historically ignored or trivialized notions specific to culturally and linguistically diverse students: (1) gifted students must be compared with others not just by age, but also experience and environment and (2) outstanding talents are present in students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. This definition calls for much needed and long overdue attention to local and preferably building norms. Specifically, gifted students need to be identified and served in every school building.

Challenging Definitions and Theories of Giftedness

Definitions and theories of giftedness are normed and conceptualized on middle-class Whites (Ford, 2013b; Sternberg, 2007a, 2007b). Hence, the system inherently serves and privileges its target population. Such theories of giftedness have been operationalized primarily and almost exclusively by intelligence tests and achievement tests, respectively. In the majority of schools, students must obtain an IQ score of 130 or higher to be identified as intellectually gifted and/or they must score at or above 96th

percentile on an achievement test. This system is based on the belief that giftedness is synonymous with intelligence and achievement, and that both can be measured validly and reliably with standardized tests, regardless of culture and other demographic variables (e.g., income), and irrespective of exposure and opportunity. Commonly cited opportunities to learn, such as teacher quality, rigorous curriculum, student academic engagement, and high expectations are absent from many classrooms serving large populations of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2014). Thus, when access is determined almost exclusively on colorblind and decontextualized cut scores and tools, students of color are placed at a substantial disadvantage. Such assumptions and criteria trivialize and ignore the importance of culture, language, and experience on test performance, which were rightfully noted in the 1993 federal definition. Tests and other instruments (checklists, nomination forms, etc.) must be selected with the culture and language of students in mind, along with equity. To do otherwise is to shortchange gifted students of color who are every bit as capable as White students.

Rethinking the Referral and Identification Process for Gifted Education

To increase the number of under-represented students of color (e.g., Black and Hispanic) in gifted education will require more than good intentions. Good intentions alone will not equip educators with the ability to see potential where they do not expect to find gifts and talents. For example, some teachers hold negative stereotypes and inaccurate perceptions about

the promise, potential, and possibilities of students of color to engage in superior academic performance (e.g., Grissom & Redding, 2016). These negative stereotypes blind teachers from the brilliance of Black and Hispanic students that emerges from their different cultural and experiential perspectives.

Much can be learned from the early research of Fitz-Gibbons (1974) to improve the teacher referral and identification process for placement in gifted education of under-represented students of color, who relative to the teacher referral process, concluded this:

One might hazard the generalization that when teacher judgments are relied upon for placement or identification it is likely to be the child who does not relate to the teacher who gets overlooked, despite the fact that his achievements and ability are equal to or higher than those of the students recognized as bright. (pp. 61-62)

To repeat, evidence of this mismatch between teacher and student is cited in the research of Grissom and Redding (2016) who found, even when Black students had equivalent scores on relevant achievement measures compared to their White peers, under-identification remained. This pattern of indifference persisted when controlling for other background factors, such as health and socioeconomic status, and characteristics of classrooms and schools. They concluded, that one of the mediating factors was *teacher discretion*. In contrast to this persistent pattern, they also found that ethnically matched Black students were more likely to be identified and placed in gifted programs by Black teachers. The effects of ethnic matching are further explained by the higher expectations expressed by Black

teachers. Hence, we argue that an equitable referral and identification process is critical to avoid the pervasive shortchanging of under-represented students of color with regard to identification and placement in gifted education. In the next sections, we describe and explain two formulas to increase the numbers of under-represented students of color in gifted education to safeguard claims of “ignorance” under the guise of indifference.

Gifted Under-Representation Formula and Equity Allowance

Formula

Several statistics can be used to analyze disproportionality or representation discrepancies. Here we utilize the Relative Difference in Composition Index (RDCI) to quantify disproportionality (e.g., see Ford, 2013b). The RDCI for a racial group is the difference between their gifted education composition and general education composition, expressed as a discrepancy percentage. A guiding question is: “What is the difference between the composition (percentage) of Black or Hispanic students in general education compared to the composition of Black or Hispanic students in gifted education?” Guided by this question, this formula permits educators to compare discrepancies. A discrepancy is significant when under-representation exceeds the threshold determined legally and/or by decision makers.

Racial quotas are illegal in the U.S. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that equity thresholds are *not* racial quotas. With quotas, group representation in school enrollment and gifted education enrollment is proportional; meaning that if Black or Hispanic students comprise 50% of a school district (state or even

school building), they must comprise 50% of gifted education enrollment. This is not the mechanism employed with equity thresholds. After sharing several explicit examples using the RDCI, we present an equity allowance formula to help determine whether under-representation is beyond statistical chance – whether the imbalance is primarily influenced by human-made obstacles (e.g., subjectivity, deficit thinking, prejudice) and, thus, possibly discriminatory (see Ford, 2013a, 2013b; Valencia, 2010). The RDCI for under-representation is computed as $[100\% - (\text{Composition } (\%) \text{ of Black students in gifted education}) / (\text{Composition } (\%) \text{ of Black students$

in general education)]. Using decimals yields the same results.

Black and Hispanic students are under-identified at an alarming rate. Each year, over 500,000 Black and Hispanic students combined are not identified as gifted (Ford, 2010, 2013b; Ford, 2015). Table 1 presents the national Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) for 2006, 2009 and 2011. Historically, Black students' under-representation has ranged from 43% to 47%; for Hispanic students, the range is from 31% to 37%. Under-representation is a national problem that exists in the majority of states and school districts for Black students (see Ford & Whiting, 2008b; Grissom & Redding, 2016).

Table 1. Black and Hispanic Students: Under-Representation in Gifted Education Nationally (2006, 2009, 2011).

	National Enrollment	Gifted Enrollment	Under-Representation Percent
2006 Black Hispanic	17.13% 20.4%	9.15% 12.79%	47% 37%
2009 Black Hispanic	16.17% 15.4%	9.9% 11.3%	43% 31%
2011 Black Hispanic	19% 25%	10% 16%	47% 36%

Source: (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2006, 2009, 2011). See <http://ocrdata.ed.gov>

Based on the data in table 1, we pose the following questions to inform the application of the Equity Allowance Formula: as described in Ford (2013b). “When is under-representation significant?” “How severe must under-representation be in order to require changes?” “How severe must under-representation be to be considered discriminatory?” While considering these questions, recall that when the percentage of under-representation *exceeds* the designated threshold in the Equity Allowance Formula (also called Equity Index), it is beyond statistical chance; therefore, human error is operating -- attitudes, instruments, and policies and procedures may be discriminatory.

Intent must be considered when examining under-representation, depending on the legislation applied. For instance, the doctrine of disparate impact holds that practices may be considered discriminatory and illegal if they have adverse impact on students regarding a protected trait. Protected traits vary by statute, but most U.S. federal civil rights laws (e.g., Title VI) include race, color, religion, national origin, and gender as protected traits. Despite these protections the burden of proof remains.

Under the disparate impact doctrine, a violation of Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act may be proven by demonstrating that an instrument, practice, and/or policy has a disproportionately adverse effect on Black and Hispanic students. Thus, the disparate impact doctrine prohibits school personnel from using a facially neutral practice that has an unjustified adverse impact on members of a protected class. A facially neutral employment practice is one that does not *appear* to be discriminatory on the surface; instead, it is discriminatory in its application and/or its effect (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disparate_impact). The practices common to gifted education require further examination to redress possible

discriminatory practices. The Equity Index (EI) provides a contextualized lens to guide these investigations.

Used in a decontextualized way, the RDCI is insufficient for determining inequitable and/or discriminatory under-representation. Thus, the RDCI should be used and interpreted within the appropriate context. The EI helps to provide sufficient context. Calculating the EI requires two steps.

Step 1: [(Composition (%) of Black students in general education) x Threshold of 20% = B. This is abbreviated as $C \times T = B$.]

Step 2: [(Composition (%) of Black students in general education) - B = EI. This is abbreviated as $C - B = EI$. For example, Black students were 19% of school enrollment in 2011, the EI using a 20% allowance would be: B is $19\% \times 20\% = 3.8\%$ and EI is $19\% - 3.8\% = 15.2\%$.]

Thus, Black students should represent at *minimal* 15.2% of students in gifted education in the U.S. However, the percentage for 2011 is 10% nationally. The under-representation for Black students is not only significant, but also beyond statistical chance, suggesting that racial discrimination is operating. To achieve the minimal equity goal, educators must increase Black students' representation nationally by at least 5.2%. This is presented in Table 2.

The goals for Hispanic students also appear in Table 2. Our nation's gifted programs are racially segregated, as conveyed by data presented in table 2. Using the aforementioned formula yields a similar result for Hispanic students, but not to the same degree. As a nation and educational system, we are far from fulfilling the mandates of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)* in gifted education.

Table 2. *Black and Hispanic Students' Under-Representation and Equity Allowance Index Nationally (2006, 2009, 2011)*

Year Black Hispanic	National Enrollment	Gifted Enrollment	Percentage of Under- Representation	Equity Allowance Goal
2006 Black	17.13%	9.15%	47%	13.7% (increase from 9.15% to 13.7%)
Hispanic	20.4%	12.79%	37%	16.32% (increase from 12.79% to 16.32%)
2009 Black	16.17%	9.9%	43%	12.9% (increase from 9.9% to 12.9%)
Hispanic	15.4%	11.3%	31%	12.32% (increase from 11.3% to 12.32%)
2011 Black	19%	10%	47%	15.2% (increase from 10% to 15.2%)
Hispanic	25%	16%	36%	20% (increase from 16% to 20%)

Source: Ford (2013b)

Recommendations for Changes Regarding Under-Represented Gifted Students of Color

The potential of too many Black and Hispanic students remains untapped because they are denied access to gifted classes supported and protected by ignorance on the one hand, and indifference on the other hand. Prejudice,

stereotypes, and deficit-oriented paradigms contribute to segregated gifted programs (which violate the principles and mandates of the *Civil Right Act of 1964* and *Brown v. Board of Education, 1954*) that are sorely inadequate at recruitment and retention (Ford, 2013b; Ford, 2015; Valencia, 2010). *McFadden vs. Board of Education for Illinois School District U-46*

(2013) reminds us and must compel us to continue advocating for students of color, that discrimination is not only unintentional ignorance, but also intentional, and that discrimination in gifted education perpetuates segregation and indifference. The professional will and accountability to *eliminate* manufactured barriers (e.g., conscious ignorance), to challenge the status quo, and to advocate for under-represented gifted Black and Hispanic students is crucial. The following recommendations are offered with this perspective in mind.

Analyze and Disaggregate Under-Representation Data

Attitudes (ignorance, prejudice, deficit thinking, indifference and racism) and inequitable policies and practices must be recognized, scrutinized, investigated, confronted, and interrupted to address the indifference surrounding the recruitment and retention of under-represented students of color in gifted education. The following questions can be used to redress the problematic aforementioned policies and practices, and instruments:

- How do screening and referral processes account for the representation of Black and Hispanic students at the district and state level?
- How pervasive and severe is under-representation?
- Which factors mediate under-representation (e.g., ignorance; indifference; subjectivity and prejudice in beliefs, attitudes and values; subjective instruments, such as checklists and nomination forms; biased and unfair tests; discriminatory policies and procedures)?
- Which policies and procedures moderate under-representation (e.g., reliance on teacher referral or checklist

versus school-wide grade level screening: parent/caregiver referral or checklists: designated cutoff scores; grade at which gifted programs begins; ongoing screening; convenience and location of testing sites; modes of communicating in neighborhoods)?

- Are procedures in place to identify educators who persistently under-refer Black and Hispanic students? How are they supported, educated, trained, and held accountable?
- How effective are family referrals for under-represented students, and what support mechanisms are in place to increase awareness and knowledge?

Determine Equity Allowance Goals

After studying the magnitude and root causes of under-representation, equity goals must be set to desegregate gifted education. We propose using the 20% Equity Allowance (Ford, 2013b). The equity allowance acknowledges that giftedness exists in *every* racial group. Students' experiential and cultural funds of knowledge and opportunities to learn are not always equally and equitably distributed. The equity allowance is a quantifiable metric that accounts for differences and injustices, thereby opening doors for many non-White students who might otherwise not be identified and served in gifted education. Moreover, the formula safeguards claims of ignorance that typically can be described as indifference to those who are not part of the status quo.

Collect Data on the Experiences of Gifted Black and Hispanic Students

What are the experiences of former and current Black and Hispanic students in gifted education? Examine the intersections of gender, class, and race by disaggregating data. Disaggregate data by gender and income – What are the

experiences of males compared to females, and low-income students compared to middle and high-income students? Multiple data collection methods should be employed. For example, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and case studies should all be utilized to gather data from students and families regarding how their experiences can be useful for both recruitment, retention and to disrupt ignorance and challenge indifference. It is essential to study the implicit and explicit motivating factors that support persistence in gifted classes. Aside from families, peers, educators, and the community there are other unique socializing agents that warrant further investigation.

- Do students feel welcome in gifted classrooms?
- Do teachers, counselors, administrators, and other school personnel affirm gifted Black and Hispanic students?
- How do gifted Black and Hispanic students find ways to *excel* rather than *exist* in gifted education?
- How supportive, involved, and informed are their families in order to serve as advocates and cultural brokers?

Evaluate and Promote Pre- and In-Service Teachers' Preparation in Gifted Education

Despite their responsibility for referrals, nominations, and teaching gifted students, educators remain under-prepared in gifted education. Gifted education preparation is essential and can take place via coursework, degree programs, and professional development (conferences and in-service workshops). Training must be perpetual and substantive, which means targeting equitable identification and assessment instruments, policies and procedures, and development -- affective, psychological, academic, social, and cultural (Ford, 2010, 2011; Young, 2009). Another issue

that deserves similar attention is the absence of educators of color in gifted education programs (e.g., teachers, counselors, administrators). The preparation of current and future educators to teach in gifted education calls for meaningful consideration of culturally responsiveness as a preferred disposition in education in general, gifted education in particular.

Culturally Responsiveness and Teachers

Culturally responsive educators are adept at motivating all gifted students, and understand that students of color may face more challenges than their White classmates and peers, as already noted. They recognize the importance of multiple forms of motivation. Successful teachers of gifted Black and Hispanic students motivate and affirm students -- cognitively, academically, socially-emotionally, and culturally. Cultural competence and culturally responsiveness are one in the same for effective teachers of gifted students of color.

Evaluate and Promote Cultural Competence Among Teachers

Educators who lack cultural competence risk misinterpreting or worse undermining the educational experiences of Black and Hispanic students, and thus contribute to segregated gifted education programs. Formal, substantive, and comprehensive multicultural preparation helps ensure educational equity (Banks, 2010, 2015). Professional development on culture and cultural differences must be ongoing and beyond surface level applications. Professional development activities should include defining and understanding culture and cultural differences without a deficit orientation, recognizing how culture impacts teaching and learning, testing and assessment, and classroom environment (e.g., relationships with teachers and classmates, classroom management). Field experiences, participation in community events,

and family visits are opportunities for educators to discover the unique funds of knowledge present in gifted students of color. Again, it is vital that educators connect with students' cultural practices; that their work is culturally responsive and affirming.

Increase the Demographics of Black and Hispanic Teachers in Gifted Education

White teachers comprise a significant proportion of the education profession (Kena et al., 2014). Nationally, Whites comprise 85% of teachers, Black and Hispanic teachers each represent 7% of teachers, and Asians are 1% of teachers. Thus, Students from every racial and cultural background continue to graduate without ever having a Black or Hispanic teacher, counselor, school psychologist, and/or administrator. The representation of teachers of color in gifted education is even more disproportionate, where Black teachers are practically invisible (Ford, 2011). Is this due to "ignorance" or indifference or both? Culturally and linguistically diverse teachers can and do serve as cultural brokers, role models, mentors, and strong advocates for Black and Hispanic students (Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2010; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Thus, their presence in gifted education is equally necessary.

Summary and Conclusion

In *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregating children on the basis of race was unconstitutional. This landmark court ruling signaled the end of legalized racial segregation in our nation's schools, overruling the 'separate but equal' principle set forth in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. Yet, ignorance and indifference to safeguard the practice of segregation endures in schools and gifted education classrooms.

In the *McFadden* (2013) ruling, the presence and persistence of intentional and

unintentional discrimination in gifted education was brought to light. This court ruling serves as a reminder that discrimination is alive and present in gifted classrooms. While other districts may not have been found guilty of *intentional* discrimination, it is clear that *de facto* and/or *de jure* segregation is operating – unintentionally and intentionally – in many school districts all under the guise of "ignorance" when what is really operating is a type of indifference to the status quo.

Gifted education professionals must abide by the spirit and law of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) regarding desegregating classrooms, programs, and services in principle and practice. Despite small steps in the right direction, under-representation remains and these strides have been insignificant and inequitable. Educators must be proactive, deliberate, and diligent about eliminating intentional *and* unintentional barriers to recruiting and retaining students of color in gifted education -- to desegregating and integrating gifted education (see *Griggs v. Duke Power*, 1971).

This article ends with five primary takeaways and several additional discussion questions to challenge claims of ignorance and indifference. Primary takeaways to create equitable gifted programs and services for all nations include:

1. Denying access to gifted education, whether intentional or unintentional, leads to – under-identification;
2. To improve access to gifted education for under-identified Black and Hispanic students, educators must determine equity goals and how they will make changes to meet the goals despite the challenges;
3. Decreasing under-identification requires culturally responsive and equity based policies, procedures, instruments, and

- attitudes;
4. Extensive training and preparation in gifted education cannot occur in isolation, but must be complemented by extensive training/preparation in culturally competent education; and
 5. Families and communities must be supported in order to advocate for their culturally and linguistically diverse gifted children. Home-School collaboration is necessary to reach this goal.

Further Questions to Ponder for Equitable Gifted Education:

1. How might an over-reliance on tests to identify gifted students limit the access of students of color?
2. Calculate the percentage of under-representation in your district for Black and Hispanic students. Why does under-representation exist?
3. What is the equitable goal for under-represented students in your district?
4. What are the shortcomings of teacher referrals for culturally and linguistically diverse students and how can such referrals be improved?
5. What are five or more culturally responsive strategies that should be implemented to improve access to gifted education for Black and Hispanic students overall and in your school district?
6. What are 3-5 equity or access related topics that should be discussed in professional development and coursework with gifted education teachers and other educators?

Conclusion

When ignorance and indifference persist, the needs of gifted students of color, their gifts and

talents, remain unnurtured. Currently, thousands of gifted students of color remain unidentified, undereducated, and miseducated. Envisioning and creating gifted education as a space that recognizes and supports the intellectual gifts and talents of Black and Hispanic students will require educators be deliberate and intentional about critically examining their own attitudes, beliefs, and practices concerning underserved populations in a concerted effort to redress the absence of their untapped gifts and talents. A critical examination and disruption of this trend will require attention and consideration to those important structures that limit access and prevent equity in gifted education. Many of the most salient structures were addressed in this article as stubborn artifacts of gifted education that are problematic and impede progress toward desegregation of a space that remains segregated.

Recommendations for policies and practices to dismantle these structures are also provided. However, as discussed in this article many obstacles and challenges remain before equitable change(s) can occur. In conclusion, we challenge readers to an introspective self-assessment of their own ignorance and/or indifference as it pertains to this matter. It is our hope that this article provides sufficient knowledge to inform and challenge both ignorance and indifference. Ignorance and indifference cannot and should not prevent students of color from realizing the full potential of their gifts and talents. For as Dr. Maya Angelou once said “a bird doesn’t sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song”. Many under-represented students of color have a song, but the question is, will we let them sing?

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