STRATEGIES FOR IDENTIFYING GIFTED & TALENTED MINORITY STUDENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA: NURTURING FOR A BRIGHT TOMORROW (NBT)

RESEARCH BRIEF PREPARED BY THE RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH (REDY) PROGRAM AT DUKE UNIVERSITY
Gifted & Talented Education & Minority Students

Programs serving gifted and talented students have grown considerably in recent years. In a 2014 national survey, 92.5% of districts reported having gifted and talented programming for students at the elementary level, 83.7% at the middle school level, and 75.1% at the high school level (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2014). However, while districts are increasing resources and support for gifted & talented students, minority students have been historically underserved by these programs. According to Ford (2014), at least half a million more Black and Hispanic students needed to be identified as gifted in 2009 and 2011 in order for there to have been equitable representation. As the U.S. population becomes more diverse, districts will have to find ways to ensure their gifted and talented classrooms reflect this diversity. This brief examines national trends in minority identification, best practices for increasing minority representation as well as how one district in North Carolina is using an intervention to address gaps in identification rates.

Trends in Minority Identification

According to data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, the number of total U.S. students participating in a gifted and talented program remained around 6% between 2000 and 2012 (Figure 1). However, different minority groups experienced different changes in identification rates: while the share of Asian students represented in gifted programs increased by 2% during this time period, the percentage of American Indian and Black students participating in gifted programs remained at 1% and 8% respectively. However, Hispanic and Latino students experienced a 7.3% increase in identification between 2000 and 2012.

Strategies for Increasing Minority Identification

Researchers have identified several factors, such as states and districts reliance on a single assessment to identify gifted students or cultural biases of teachers and administrators (Ford, 2013), that potentially explain the low identification rates of minority students. Many research-based strategies have emerged to increase minority identification in gifted and talented programs. Those strategies include ensuring access to high quality instruction (Felder et al., 2015; Harmon, 2004), using multiple, culturally sensitive measures for identification (Ford 2013; Ryser, 2011), providing high quality professional development that recognizes cultural biases (Ford 2011; Siegle & Powell 2004; Ford, Moore & Milner, 2005) and early identification and the opportunity for rescreening (Ford 2013; Olszewski-Kubilius & Thompson, 2010).

The U.S. Department of Education defines gifted and talented students as “those youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The Case of Gifted & Talented Identification in North Carolina

In North Carolina, the total number of students in the state participating in a gifted and talented program was 4% higher than the national rate between 2000 and 2012 (Figure 2). Black students were represented at high rates than other minority groups in the state — their participation increased from 10% to 11% during the time period. The number of Hispanic students participating in gifted programs increased from 4% to 5.79% by 2012, Asian student participation increased from 2% to 4.91%, while the representation of American Indian students remained at 1%.

The decline in the number of White students participating in gifted and talented programs demonstrates a trend towards increased diversity in gifted classrooms (Figure 3). However, the participation of White students in gifted and talented programs was higher in North Carolina than the national rate between 2000 and 2012. Even in a country that is becoming more diverse and projected to continue growing in its diversity, White students still constitute an overwhelming majority (61% of gifted and talented programs nationally, and 73% in North Carolina) of the students served by these programs.

Nurturing for a Bright Tomorrow

A district in North Carolina is working with Duke University’s Research on the Education and Development of Youth program (REDY) to close the achievement gap and increase the number of gifted students from underrepresented populations by instituting the Project Bright IDEA curriculum. Initially developed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and Duke University in 2001, Project Bright Idea emphasizes critical and metacognitive thinking in Kindergarten, and first and second grade classrooms. The intervention is preparatory, developing students’ cognitive abilities before the district’s universal screening in third grade. The intervention, Nurturing for a Bright Tomorrow (NBT), is currently being administered as an experiment with 16 treatment and 16 control schools across the district.

The NBT Curriculum

Under Nurturing for a Bright Tomorrow, participating in gifted and talented programs demonstrates a trend towards increased diversity in gifted classrooms (Figure 3). However, the participation of White students in gifted and talented programs was higher in North Carolina than the national rate between 2000 and 2012. Even in a country that is becoming more diverse and projected to continue growing in its diversity, White students still constitute an overwhelming majority (61% of gifted and talented programs nationally, and 73% in North Carolina) of the students served by these programs.

The NBT Curriculum

Under Nurturing for a Bright Tomorrow, participating Kindergarten, first and second grade teachers are trained to provide an inquiry-based environment for all students. Lessons emphasize thinking skills, learning styles, and habits of mind — all of which are behaviors necessary for lifelong learning.

- **Thinking Skills** – lessons emphasize improving students’ critical thinking and metacognition, skills necessary for completing difficult tasks (Chichekian & Shore, 2014). Additionally, these lessons also address effective social interactions between students and their peers by highlighting discussion and think-pair-share time.

- **Task Rotations & Learning Styles** – lessons acknowledge that there are various ways students process and organize new information (Dai 2014). By exposing students to multiple learning styles through task rotations, this program aims to engage and motivate all students regardless of their primary or preferred learning style.

- **Habits of Mind** – lessons promote patterns of thinking and behaving used by successful individuals when confronted with problems with nonobvious solutions (Costa & Kallick, 2008). Habits of mind include persisting, managing impulsivity, thinking flexibly among others.

These components are integrated into a concept-based curriculum aligned with STEM and social studies standards in addition to English and Math Common Core State Standards. We believe students of all ages and abilities can learn to analyze theories, problems, and abstract ideas by engaging with the Bright IDEA concept-based curriculum to solve problems in the real world.

**Changing Teacher Dispositions**

As indicated above, teacher cultural bias is a potential barrier to increasing gifted identification rates for minority students. NBT shows teachers how to create classroom environments that actively and consistently engage all students in sophisticated investigations of materials; to ensure all students understand and apply advanced critical and creative processes. In a previous administration of the Bright IDEA curriculum, North Carolina educators reported positive changes in their dispositions, with many more believing all students had traits, aptitudes and gifted behaviors that could be nurtured for potential creativity, scientific problem solving and academic and job skills needed to succeed in the 21st Century.

For more information about the NBT project, visit: https://redy.ssri.duke.edu
Figure 2: North Carolina Minority Participation in Gifted & Talented Programs (2000-2012)

Figure 3: White Student Participation in Gifted & Talented Programs (2000-2012)

References:


