A Review of Assessment Issues in Gifted Education and Their Implications for Identifying Gifted Minority Students

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This review provides background information concerning the issues that affect the identification of gifted minority students, suggests implications for developing more effective identification procedures, and proposes directions for formulating a new approach to the resolution of the problems of identifying gifted minority students—a population that is seriously underrepresented in programs for the gifted.

Although there is consensus that gifted children can be found in every level of society and in every cultural and ethnic group, there is little question that minority and economically disadvantaged students are not found in programs in proportionate numbers. Their underrepresentation has been attributed to a variety of historical, philosophical, psychological, theoretical, procedural, social, and political factors. Each of these factors, singularly and in combination, has impacted the assessment of giftedness in minority student populations.

Three major reasons for underrepresentation are discussed:

a. Test Bias. By far, underrepresentation of minority participation in programs for the gifted is most frequently attributed to biases in standardized testing—charges that tests are, for various reasons, prejudiced or unfair to ethnic minorities, the economically disadvantaged, and individuals whose first language is not English.

b. Selective Referrals. Two factors have a significant influence on the underreferral process: teacher attitudes toward and knowledge about minority students and the type of school these students are likely to attend.

c. Reliance on deficit-based paradigms. The focus on deficits makes recognition of the strengths difficult and, in addition, detracts from needed structural changes in schools.

In addition to proposals for dealing with assessment-related problems by designing strategies for reducing or eliminating test bias, improving the referral process strategies, and stressing cultural strengths rather than cultural deficits, other recommendations for modifying traditional assessment procedures include: (a) the use of multiple criteria and nontraditional measures and procedures, and (b) modifying the selection criteria.

It is argued that inequities in assessment need to be considered from a broader perspective, one that takes into account the multiple factors that affect the identification of gifted minority students across social, cultural, and economic groups. Toward this end, four aspects of assessment are discussed with implications for research: (a) the construct of giftedness, (b) the referral process, (c) the identification process, and (d) the process by which decisions are made using assessment information for curriculum and instructional planning.
There is no doubt that the need for new paradigms that will include populations that have not been adequately identified and whose potential has not been sufficiently nurtured has important implications for individuals and society. Student identification procedures and program implementation must take into account the needs of a variety of students from diverse backgrounds.

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Conclusions

1. Although there is consensus that gifted children can be found in every level of society and in every cultural and ethnic group, minority and economically disadvantaged students have not been found in gifted programs in proportionate numbers.

2. The underrepresentation of minority student populations has been attributed to a variety of factors including test bias, selective referrals and a reliance on deficit-based paradigms.

3. Inequities in assessment need to be considered from a broad perspective that takes into account the multiple factors (historical, philosophical, psychological, theoretical, procedural, social, and political) that affect the identification of gifted minority students. Suggested directions for future research include:
   o addressing the fundamental question: What constitutes giftedness and is it manifested the same in all cultures and groups?
   o designing and testing ways to improve the referral process and increase teacher understanding of the different ways talent potential may be exhibited by students from different cultural, economic, and language groups
   o exploring the effective use of information about students from a variety of objective and subjective sources
- developing effective programs and curricula that maximize the interactive relationships among assessment, curriculum and instruction.

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