**The Educational, Cultural, and Psychological Perspectives of**

**Diversity in Gifted Education**

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**Abstract**

Racially diverse gifted students face the same learning tasks related to other students their age including developing identity and sense of self, relationships with peers, and autonomy. The intersectionality between their race, exceptionality, and cultural perceptions may hold negative connotations towards the label of being gifted. In this article, the author reviews the challenges diverse gifted students experience as learners with a different world view from average students and additionally, the author seeks to express how educational opportunities, personal culture, and social emotional learning impact these gifted students. Building a culturally responsive and educationally supportive classroom environment while modeling the use of social emotional growth tools, educators are able to support diverse gifted students as they encounter the intersectionality of their giftedness and race. This article raises a social justice issue as it explores the responsibility of the educational system to bring awareness and institute research-based practices that create opportunities for excellence in education in conjunction with promoting equity for diverse gifted learners.

*Keywords:* diverse gifted learners, equity, gifted education, social emotional learning, social justice

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The Educational, Cultural, and Psychological Perspectives of

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**Introduction**

As the demographics of the population of the United States shift to reflect the growth in racial minority numbers, so too have the demographics of the students being taught in public schools (Mayes & Moore, 2016). Although more racial minority students represent the student bodies of many educational establishments, those serving as teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors to these students are often underrepresented in relation to the population being taught (Naglieri & Ford, 2015; Mayes & Moore, 2016). This dichotomy raises the question as to how to best meet the needs of diverse learners through the mission and vision of schools while reducing excellence gaps.

All stakeholders investing in the future of our country need to be informed of the social inequality existing in the education system, including the area of gifted education (Lakin, 2016; Naglieri & Ford, 2015; Mayes & Moore, 2016). Due to biases reflecting perceptions and stereotypes of what traits demonstrate giftedness, such as low achievement expectations educators have towards minorities, fewer non-Anglo students are identified as gifted (Naglieri & Ford, 2015; Mayes & Moore, 2016). The intersectionality students face between race and intelligence versus cultural acceptance is an area in which students have also been overlooked for identification of gifted services. Students have often been labeled “trouble-makers,” “class clowns,” or “problem students” for teachers based on their antics in classrooms. Under these circumstances, teachers have less of a desire to recommend students for gifted testing (Mayes & Moore, 2016).

In addition to the lack of identification to receive gifted services, racially diverse gifted students also face the intersectionality of their race and the perceptions their cultures may hold towards the gifted label (Heinfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008). The intersection of negative perceptions of being gifted, while having the mental capacity to be able to see the world in a different way, challenges diverse gifted students. For instance, they purposefully disconnect themselves from being identified as gifted to fit into the cultural norms held by their groups (Whiting, 2009).

Through the use of social cognitive strategies, such as with the concept of developing a “growth mindset” or the belief that through learning and effort intelligence grows (Yeager & Dweck, 2012), diverse gifted students can foster a conceptual understanding of brain growth through positive and negative experiences. The way students learn to navigate these experiences builds grit, empathy, self-control, integrity, and an appreciation to embrace their diversity (Hoerr, 2017). Using the standards set forth from the National Association for Gifted Children (2010), gifted children should be provided a learning environment fostering personal growth and social responsibility.

This central question of this composition is: “How does a school community meet the needs of diverse gifted learners facing the intersectionality of race, intelligence, and cultural acceptance?” By examining the literature surrounding the educational, cultural, and social cognitive perspectives of giftedness, suggestions for the best research-based practices school communities could implement to support this group of learners will be explored.

**Literature Review**

The literature on racially diverse gifted education has addressed numerous issues including identification of students, lack of teacher training to identify those in need of gifted services, how to differentiate for racially diverse gifted students within the regular education classroom, as well as the cultural and psychological perspectives motivating these students.

**Educational Perspectives on Gifted Minority Students**

The literature on youth identified as gifted varies depending on the contextual criteria (NAGC, 2010; Peterson, 1999). The definitions and criteria vary depending on educational settings and characteristics of gifted students. These involve a perception of exceptional performance, ability or talent (NAGC, 2010). Those identified as gifted may find few intellectual peers at school, while the more profoundly gifted students may find greater social emotional challenges relating with classmates (Peterson, 1999). When identifying diverse gifted learners, the intersectionality of giftedness, race, and the belief in oneself to be able to succeed are all factors contributing to attitudes and criteria for educational excellence (Burney, 2008; Coleman & Anjur, 2017; Kitano & Lewis, 2005). In addition, working with friendly teachers with whom mentor relationships have been established matters to gifted adolescents who perceive feelings of value and respect. When students feel comfortable, they ask clarifying questions, thus becoming increasingly independent leading to greater academic achievement. (Miedihensky, 2018; Samardzija & Peterson, 2015).

Studies regarding the identification of diverse gifted learners have revealed a disparity of race in the number of students being recommended for testing as well as being identified as gifted (Naglieri & Ford, 2015; VanTassel-Baska, Feng & Evans, 2007). For instance, according to Allen (2017) these numbers indicate only 10% of Black students were identified as gifted while 19% were identified as having special education needs. The deficit view of educator referrals impacts the identification process as it focuses on remediation rather than enhancing the positives students may possess. Factors such as poverty (socio-economic status or SES) and lack of an equitable opportunity to learn (OTL) also impede teachers from recognizing giftedness in diverse learners (Allen, 2017).

Both the lack of teacher referrals and the process of identification significantly contributes to the under identification of racially diverse learners as gifted (Naglieri & Ford, 2015). Hamilton et al. (2018) identified three factors contributing to the disproportionate representation of diverse learners: utilizing a referral-based system of student nomination, comparing low-income students with fewer opportunities to learn with their higher income peers, and using achievement testing scores as multiple measures in determining cognitive ability. In addition to these factors, McCluskey (2017) stressed that the use of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores as an outdated practice because the manner is which IQ tests have been constructed positions diverse learners at a disadvantage. These tests are structured to measure past experience and background over intelligence and ability. One way to combat this inequity is the use of universal screening (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Offering the opportunity for all students to be screened for giftedness increases the ability to identify gifted students and offer them appropriate needs based educational services. Additionally, using a non-verbal assessment such as the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test offers students lacking vocabulary and quantitative skills the opportunity to demonstrate cognitive strengths through an alternative method (Lakin, 2016; Naglieri & Ford, 2015).

**Racial Discrimination in Schools and with Diverse Gifted Students**

The lack of teacher referrals stems in part from the educational disparities of race, income levels of students, and from teacher perceptions. In a recent article entitled, “How Teachers Talk About Educational Disparities” (2019), the Education Week Research Center surveyed more than 1,300 teachers across the country in an attempt to understand the language choices teachers make in correlation with the understanding of what is at the heart of the disparities in education. For Black and Latino students, a deficit view regarding the educational outcomes of students was perceived by teachers for these two groups. In contrast, Asian students were not viewed by teachers as having an opportunity gap compared to white students. Teachers also cited a lack of student motivation and limited parent involvement as major reasons for the disparities in educational success of Black and Latino students. However, most teachers did not think genetics played any role in explaining why white students outperformed their Black and Latino counterparts. For Asian students, teachers viewed the students as more productive with greater parent involvement. The influence of school quality was not seen as having as strong of an influence on the educational success of these students. While 57-64% of the teachers surveyed felt the educational system perpetuated inequalities and should not be held responsible for the inequalities existing for Black and Latino students being successful in school, 60% also indicated the educational system was not a successful engine for economic mobility for these students, either. Having such a dichotomy in the role of schools for the success of students while also negating responsibility for the failure of students contributes to the educational system preventing students from reaching their fullest potential.

When teacher perception and interactions with students and parents is negatively influenced through biases and low expectations, the institutional racism within the educational system perpetuates the inequity and unjust treatment of students (Leonardo, 2013; Lynn & Parker, 2006; McGee & Stovall, 2015). The inequity of education was addressed in the landmark case of *Brown v. Board* in 1954, where state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools were deemed unconstitutional, even if the segregated schools were otherwise equal in quality. However, the problem of institutional racism has not disappeared. Institutional practices and underfunding impose conditions preventing opportunities and equality based upon race (Ford, 1996). This prevents the services and opportunities for those of various races to be at a disadvantage to their white peers. The objective to identify and challenge racial biases in order to change school culture, practices, and the oppressive policies towards minority students is a huge, but worthy undertaking.

**Multicultural Teacher Training**

Another issue raised through reviewing the literature in regards to racially diverse gifted students and meeting their educational needs has been the lack of teacher training (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002; NAGC, 2010; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Lack of sensitivity to cultural characteristics of gifted students hinders educators from making fair and equitable referrals for gifted identification. Low expectations and misconceptions by teachers towards minority students impedes gifted identification. This is particularly poignant if they are not already high achieving students (NAGC, 2010).

Diverse and inclusive teaching practices need to recognize any biases or stereotypes teachers, guidance counselors, or administrators may have established. In order to construct an educational culture of respect which boosts the confidence and abilities of racially diverse students, it is important for educators to become more informed about the history and culture of various groups other than their own. Providing texts and readings focusing on the successes, contributions, accomplishments, and histories of racial minority heroes and role models should be incorporated into the curriculum of schools to make learning more relevant for all students (Ford & Harris, 1999). This also includes the need to recognize and eliminate bias within the curriculum. Materials and resources should be examined for the countenance of negative representations of groups, such as cultural, ethnic, and racial overgeneralizations, stereotyping, omissions, superior-inferior positions, ethnocentrism, minimization, classism, and superior-inferior positions (Ford, 1996). Promoting inclusivity within the classroom benefits the racial minority attitudes of students towards living in a diverse world. Additionally, students also begin to interact in deeper ways with the curriculum and learn to appreciate diverse perspectives (Coleman & Anjur, 2017).

**Cultural Perspectives on Gifted Minority Students**

One significant concept impeding the ability of teachers to identify and support the intelligence of diverse gifted learners is the disparity of what each culture sees as valuable characteristics in an individual. In the white dominant culture of the United States, the concepts of individualism, competitiveness, assertiveness, and self-promotion of achievement and accomplishments are elements teachers look for in the identification of gifted students. This, however, looks very different in Latino, Black, Asian, or American Indian cultures. These cultures see qualities such as collaboration, selfless contribution, adaptability, or not focusing on individual accomplishments as good qualities, respectively (Ford & Harris, 1999). If teachers are not cognizant of these values, educational opportunities for these racially diverse learners may be missed due to the opportunities not being presented due to misinterpretations of cultural norms (Peterson, 1999).

In several studies conducted by Ford (1996, 2002), stereotyping towards academic achievement or being identified as “gifted,” negatively impacted black students when they participated in gifted education. Students were accused of “acting white” or “selling out” if they achieved academically and were self-disciplined with their studies. For Black male students, this was compounded by the pressure from peers who believed that performing well academically was a feminine trait, according to their racial norms. Ford (1996, 2002) also determined that the under-representation of Black gifted students in gifted education classes alienated these students by disassociating them from racial peers. The combination of negative peer pressure and the inability to relate to other students in gifted education can be detrimental and cause Black students to underachieve or refuse to participate in programming which enriches their academic ability.

**Psychological Perspectives on Gifted Minority Students**

Individuals with a growth mindset, those who believe intelligence is transformable, are less likely to experience these challenges than those who believe intelligence is fixed (Assouline, Colangelo, Heo, & Dockery, 2013; Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Esparza, Shumow, & Schmidt, 2014; Yeager, et. al., 2016). Studies have shown the teaching of growth mindset can help students in the general education population (Dweck, 2012). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the mindsets of racially diverse gifted individuals. This subsection of students is often overlooked due to the misconceptions that those who are gifted will have the volition to make it on their own and, therefore, do not need specialized programming to meet their academic, social, and emotional growth needs.

The standards set forth from the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2010) state that gifted children should be provided a learning environment which fosters personal growth and social responsibility. Gifted students process differently than their peers, with a heightened sense of moral conscience. In the case of racially diverse gifted students, an awareness of the cultural views towards being labeled gifted, requires teachers to implement an affective curriculum to support growth (Miedijensky, 2018). A supportive emotional climate within the classroom, where student intelligence and creativity are valued, promotes students learning coping skills (Hebert et. al, 2014). The social and emotional needs of gifted students are varied in comparison to the general population. This makes the bridge between the influence of school culture and its positive or negative effects an important aspect to be addressed by educators.

Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Dweck (2007) discussed the impact of children’s beliefs on their academic performance in their study of implicit theories and achievement. The negative experiences children encounter in society or through school culture affected their beliefs in their capacity for intellectual growth. This psychological aspect to motivating students to reach their highest potential encountered positive gains through anti-stereotype training on learning goals. The motivational framework using incremental theory of malleable intelligence in this study influenced learners to hold more positive beliefs regarding their ability to overcome academic challenges and boost their resiliency. This study spanned the course of one semester. In this time, the decline in achievement was halted proving the researchers’ theory that as intelligence develops, students’ beliefs about goals, effort, and response to challenge become an essential piece to the psychological growth needed to support positive academic success.

**Analysis**

Through analysis of the literature, four different theories emerged in conjunction with the research on how a school community meets the needs of racially diverse gifted learners facing the intersectionality of race, intelligence, and cultural acceptance. These four theories include constructivism learning theory, critical race theory, self-determination theory, and social cognitive theory. Beginning with constructivist learning theory, the educational setting in which racially diverse gifted students receive support and instruction sets the foundation for meeting the needs of these students. Critical race theory affirms the awareness for educators to recognize, acknowledge and be mindful of implicit bias when working with racially diverse students. In order to understand the motivations and internal struggles of students to successfully reach their fullest potential, self-determination theory and social cognitive theory both support the psychological research findings for developing best practices when working with diverse gifted students to understand the brain science behind building resilience, grit, self-control, fostering empathy, and an appreciation to embrace their diversity (Hoerr, 2017).

**Constructivist Learning Theory**

The basis of constructivist learning theory centers around the concepts of active learning. When engaging in active learning, the focus is on constructing knowledge rather than acquiring knowledge. Each students’ unique interpretations are processed and constructed through their personal identities and interactions with information (Hein, 2019). In this setting, teachers serve as facilitators providing an environment for students to formulate their own conclusions. Student-oriented discussions to promote collaboration between students instead of relying on lectures by teachers build the foundation for a supportive, inviting, and safe classroom culture for students. It promotes students actively learning by working together to solve problems using critical thinking skills.

For racially diverse gifted students, the use of constructivist learning theory to support the academic challenges required to meet their needs scaffolds builds upon each individual’s unique providence and experiences. Some of these racially diverse gifted students come from home situations of low socio-economic status with differing background knowledge as compared to white students since they might not be familiar with typical middle-American topics being covered in classes (i.e. golf). Instead of having information lectured to them with little to no relatable context, the constructivist model allows students to construct knowledge through self- discovery, questioning, and collaboration. This may encompass internet searches, debates, building connections between research and current events, discussions, and reflection (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013). The opportunities for interactive learning engage racially diverse gifted students and encourages them to take an active role in their education. This builds enthusiasm for learning and encourages students to strive to reach their fullest potential (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013).

Dr. Joseph Renzulli (1993), from the University of Connecticut’s Center for Gifted and Talented, developed the Enrichment Triad Model based on constructivist learning theory. Through the implementation of this model, gifted students are encouraged to actively participate in the learning by collaborating with their peers through the use of Type I, Type II, and Type III exploratory methods. Type I activities encourage discussion within the gifted students in the classroom such as through whole group discussions. Type II activities promote collaboration and seek to develop critical thinking through the use of problem solving in pairs or small groups. The final piece in the Enrichment Triad Model is the Type III project. These are individual projects driven through the exploration of students to want to learn more about a particular topic. Students delve deeper into subject matter and produce products based on individual learning styles to present their findings (Renzulli, 1993). As additional research has indicated, gifted students need to be challenged at their own levels with a variety of tasks. These tasks should be of optimal difficulty which develops and stimulates higher order thinking skills through the use of analysis, evaluation, and creative synthesis in order to engage gifted students (Burney, 2008; Clinkenbeard, 2012; Heller, 1999; Miedijensky, 2018). Through the use of constructivist learning theory, the educational system can create a supportive learning environment for gifted students to be able to reach their fullest potential.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory in relation to gifted education for diverse gifted students focuses on the intersectionality of race and intellectual exceptionality. In the education system, critical race theory acknowledges the fact that the culture of poverty, deficit thinking, and previous beliefs in society that minority students are not able to be educated has produced material consequences in the resources and environments in which racially diverse students learn (Leonardo, 2013). This lived reality within the educational system has also constructed a racially white dominated story through the resources used by schools and the perspectives of life and history taught through the lens of white people (Booth & Stanley, 2004; Ford & Harris, 1999; Leonardo, 2013).

Although white views have dominated learning environments, a transformation in educational practices has begun through the use of critical race theory to acknowledge and raise consciousness in regards to the story of racism in our country. By knowing how racially diverse student populations are excluded from the story in the history of the educational process, schools elevate the propensity to change the narrative to actively include the stories of the heroes in other cultures while respecting, embracing and celebrating the differences of all students (Coleman & Anjur, 2017).

In addition to including racially diverse students’ perspectives into the curriculum, the concept of implicit bias has to be addressed as well. The number of white teachers compared to minority teachers within schools across the United States remains significantly lower than the representation of the number of racially diverse students in school systems (Lynn & Parker, 2006). White teachers require training to become aware of their own implicit biases. This does not mean that they do not see color and treat everyone equally. It means that teachers should encourage students to embrace their racial identities and celebrate the cultural differences through respect in words and actions towards all people (Lynn & Parker, 2006).

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Using social cognitive theory, a relationship between the environmental, behavioral and personal factors of gifted learners can be examined to view the impact on social emotional growth with racially diverse gifted students. Social cognitive theory attributes cognition to be a central role where individuals are able to observe others and their environment, reflect upon their observations and alter their behaviors to self-regulate accordingly. Utilizing this theory and the impact of school culture on diverse gifted students can be used to teach these students how to empathize through social perspective, how to self-advocate their needs in a positive manner, how to set realistic goals, and deal with their own mistakes and failures (Burney, 2008).

To integrate social cognitive theory into the educational process of diverse gifted students, the science of the brain can be introduced to these students. Gaining an understanding of how they process information, what role emotions play in their decision making, and the ways in which they can use reflective thinking to grow and learn from perceived failures are all benefits of understanding the brain (Marope, 2017, Zhang & Lu, 2009). Students learn to embrace their academic process as dynamic where their performance is not fixed, they have the ability to learn new concepts and skills. They are able to grow through effort and mastering coping mechanisms to face challenging tasks. These tasks should be of high interest in order to generate an intrinsic motivation for students to enjoy the process and want to continue to self-challenge. Growth should also be personalized and not compared to other students within a class. As all gifted students have unique abilities, their growth should also be uniquely gauged for mastery (Burney, 2008).

The integration of social cognitive theory with brain science enables educators to employ the ideals of Dweck’s Growth Mindset (2008) through goal setting and enhancing self-motivation. This needs to be done in conjunction with the building of a safe learning environment where students are encouraged to take risks but also have the opportunity to reflect and resubmit work to achieve mastery (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Miedijensky, 2018). Racially diverse gifted students may face further barriers to achieving a growth mindset if they have been living in poverty, in high crime areas, or in desolate rural communities. These adverse childhood experiences where neglect and abuse have been present impede students from developing a growth mindset. Building resilience is an important characteristic for students to develop as resilience is a contributing factor to the success of students beyond their intelligence (Kitano & Lewis, 2004). The emotional coping mechanisms related to becoming more flexible in stressful situations need to be practiced in order for students to master persistence and positively seek support to overcome challenges. By integrating instructional practices that decrease stress and improve problem solving skills, students develop psychological and educational resilience. This also enhances connectivity between teachers and students, encourages self-efficacy, optimism, and validates children’s experiences while supporting pride in their heritage (Kitano & Lewis, 2004; Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002).

**Self-Determination Theory**

In order to flourish, racially diverse students need experiences rich with the opportunity to embrace their identities, however, the intrinsic desire to learn and remain motivated serves as a companion to this piece. According to Szymanski (2016), intrinsic motivation is driven by three needs: perceived competence, perceived autonomy, and perceived relatedness. These three psychological needs control the actions and feelings of students when making decisions about educational success in school. How the students interact with their peers within the classroom, the climate of the classroom environment, and whether or not their perception as to how they relate to the community influences academic success. Since diverse gifted students possess advanced cognitive abilities, academic achievement should be expected in school. The number of underachieving gifted students, however, is estimated to be between 20-40% (Symanski, 2016).

The unique social, emotion, and cognitive needs of gifted students determining academic success can be tied to perceived competence and the propensity for intrinsic motivation. Feeling competent empowers students to have control over learning activities. More effort is demonstrated when the benefits of the achievement are valued by the students. In addition to perceived competence, the relationship students develop with the teachers and fellow students within a learning environment brings a sense of relatedness of being connected and supported. To awaken the motivation for gifted students, enjoyment in the activities conducted within the classroom contributes to the belief they have the freedom to learn and the learning will benefit them (Yudha, Kartadinata & Nandang, 2017).

Self-determination theory plays an important role in the cognitive development of students when they feel they have the freedom to pursue their intellectual and creative interests. Through classes that allow for advanced and independent study, relating to school and being successful in school is achieved by perceiving the tasks they complete as intrinsically interesting and of value (Clinkbeard, 2012). The more positive attributes gifted students can control, the greater their effort and persistence. For instance, rewards and recognitions are usually associated as external motivators for students. In the case of self-determination, students who obtain positive feedback from teachers comparing their work to a stand rather than other students, exude greater effort cultivating resilience and future assignments yielding greater academic success (Clinkbeard, 2012).

Achieving personal goals serves as a motivator for self-determination of academic success. The ability to self-regulate also contributes to the academic success of gifted students. Self-regulation combines students' personal goals and their attention to their thoughts and behaviors (Mrazek et al., 2018). It is crucial to cultivate a growth mindset about self-regulation in order to reach academic success through consistent effort and perseverance. Being able to weigh the costs and benefits of the effort required to perform tasks helps students to prioritize goals and allocate effort to developing skill sets that lead to optimal performance in school. Through perceived choice, personal autonomy over student’s self-determination to succeed in school is driven by intrinsic motivation. Supporting this motivation with positive feedback and opportunities to experience and practice growth mindset in supportive learning environments serve to enhance student achievement and continued academic effort (Szymanski, 2016).

Through the integration of constructivism learning theory, critical race theory, self-determination theory, and social cognitive theory, the framework formulates a base in which to understand the relationship between the intersectionality of intelligence, race, and belief in oneself to succeed. It takes an educational system aware of the inequities and biases that exist within it to take the steps to establish research-based practices for teaching racially diverse gifted students. Teacher preparation programs, staff development, parental involvement, and community partnerships need to be formed to enact the steps necessary to support these diverse students.

**Ethical Implications**

The ethical implications in the education field for developing culturally appropriate identification procedures and best teaching practices for racially diverse gifted students should be a focus for all gifted students at not just a local level but also at the national level. Since there is no federal funding for gifted education and few states mandate or financially support gifted education, it is up to local school districts to decide to what extent it will allocate resources (financial, staff, curriculum, training, and other resources). From a leadership perspective, Lynch (2012) states the ethic of justice is one where leaders in the school community should be aware of the laws and policies related to certain groups of students. In this case, knowing the legal implications of state mandates to meet the needs of gifted students through appropriate universal screening, individualized educational plan development, and social emotional well-being of students identified as gifted should be a priority to district leadership responsible for creating policy to meet the needs of all students. Although not all states have requirements mandating the policies for educating this population of students, the National Association of Gifted Children has put forth guidelines based on best practices for the education of the gifted. Educational leadership should make themselves aware of these recommendations and take steps to ensure they are enacted.

A second ethical implication for educational leadership, according to Lynch (2012) is that of the ethic of care. Being cognizant of the implications of decisions being made regarding the services provided for gifted students is vital to the lives of these children and their families. The decisions school districts make regarding the eligibility and programming provided for racially diverse gifted students may be an everyday routine to school districts, however, parents may not understand or be aware of the benefits of gifted education or even how to have their student evaluated to receive gifted services due to language barriers or cultural variables. Through the ethic of care, it is the responsibility of school leadership to afford diverse gifted learners with the support they need for long-term success not only in the realm of resources but also in the realms of care, concern, and connection which includes the social emotional well-being of the student. Creating good citizens should be the outcome desired by educational leaders by spearheading diverse gifted learner initiatives.

A third ethical implication is the ethic of critique. Lynch (2012) states that through the ethic of critique, educational leaders should engage all stakeholders involved in the educational process. For diverse gifted students, bringing parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators together to evaluate the needs of students is an essential part of the process to best meet the needs of racially diverse gifted students. As these students often exhibit characteristics that may be misinterpreted by others as a learning deficit or behavioral issue, having the stakeholders come together to devise individualized plans appropriate for these students could improve the relationships between families and schools, especially if there have not been positive interactions in the past. It would also ensure that parents are included as partners in their children’s education. Working as a team to not only meet the needs of students to perform to their academic ability but to also overcome social injustice would create a school culture which promotes community and opportunity.

Finally, as the demographics of our country as a whole have significantly changed, it is imperative that gifted education for racially diverse students be evaluated and improved to adequately implement best practices that ensure their academic success and mental well-being. From an educational philosophy point of view, teachers' beliefs about why, what, and how they teach are formed from their own life experiences, values, home environment, and interactions with others. In order to vary the approaches educators utilize with their diverse students, challenging their own philosophies with those of other cultures and beliefs opens up new conversations about best practices for reaching and cultivating school cultures based on academic growth and excellence (Ford & Harris, 1999). Diverse gifted students have the potential to be the future leaders of our communities and nation. The school system has an ethical obligation to not only help these students become good, productive citizens but to also assist them in reaching their highest potential. This occurs by accessing and applying the students’ intellectual gifts in healthy and positive ways nurtured by educators equipped to meet the interests and stretch the intellect of their students.

**Policy Recommendations**

In terms of policy recommendations, three significant themes emerge from the research on diverse gifted students. Universal screening and multiple criteria identification tools is the first prong of meeting the needs of diverse gifted students. The second prong involves building relationships with the families and communities of gifted students to positively view and support the needs of diverse gifted students. The third prong promotes the social emotional well-being of diverse gifted learners as part of the educational process. Through the implementation of these three areas, educational institutions create a system of support, promoting excellence, academic achievement, and bright futures for this population of students.

Changing the identification system to accommodate the various characteristics of diverse gifted students, including addressing issues due to socio-economic status and lack of background experiences is the first recommendation for educational institutions to implement. Offering the opportunity for all students to be screened for giftedness increases the ability to identify students and offer them appropriate needs-based education. Additionally, using a non-verbal assessment such as the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test offers students lacking vocabulary and quantitative skills the opportunity to demonstrate cognitive strengths through an alternative testing method (Lakin, 2016; Naglieri & Ford, 2015). Using multiple criteria to view diverse students in a variety of ways instead of just an IQ score is another piece to this prong. Multiple criteria may involve inventories filled out by the students, their parents, and their teachers. It also may involve observation of a student in action in the classroom. One other way multiple criteria may help to identify a student is through examining the way in which students approach class assignments. Divergent thinking can be witnessed through the depth of discussion and alternate ways of approaching assignments that differ from their peers (Booth & Stanley, 2004, Ford & Harris, 1999, Slocumb & Payne, 2000, VanTassel-Baska, Feng, & Evans, 2007). In addition, by using universal screeners to identify diverse gifted students at young ages, additional support systems can be put into place and the overall academic careers of these students can be impacted significantly (Mayes & Moore, 2016).

Overcoming cultural biases and providing teacher training to better understand diverse gifted students is the building block to achieving the second policy recommendation of forming relationships with the families and community of diverse gifted students. Training of teachers and administrators to better understand the intersections between identities of race and giftedness enhance effectiveness of working with diverse gifted learners. Students experiencing a lack of representation of their cultural identities in the curriculum, or even in the school culture, may underperform to their potential. Including gifted education courses in teacher training programs is a way this can be achieved. Providing professional development to staff already working with gifted students in schools would also enable teachers to differentiate appropriately for these learners since 65% of gifted services are delivered only within the regular education classroom and not through pull out services in the United States (NAGC, 2010).

The third policy recommendation is the implementation of social emotional learning into the curriculum for diverse gifted students. Promoting self-awareness by helping students to understand the science behind how their brains work and ways they can grow new synaptic connections to promote growth and development are essential to fostering a learning environment for diverse gifted students. Through the use of affective teaching strategies, students learn the connection between their emotions and learning. How students feel, act and think are linked to their motivational, regulative and learning styles. By teaching diverse gifted students in a supportive environment where they have the opportunity to reflect upon their personal experiences and learn strategies to regulate their emotional reactions creates interactions giving students a chance to see failure as feedback for progress and growth. A supportive classroom culture helps develop students’ confidence and an eagerness to reach their full potential with better understanding of how their brains process information (Zhang & Lu, 2009).

**Summary**

Racially diverse gifted students face the intersectionality of their race, exceptionality and cultural perceptions while developing a sense of self in grades K - 12. The challenges these students experience due to negative school experiences and the perceptions their cultures hold towards intelligence, along with their self-perceived abilities may prohibit these students from reaching their fullest potential. As the population of schools becomes more diverse, the educational system policies and procedures for gifted identification, providing educationally challenging and supportive classroom environments, and incorporating social and emotional support learning for racially diverse students through research-based practices is vital to reduce excellence gaps.

To meet the needs of racially diverse gifted students, the literature indicated several factors to consider when working with this population of students. First, the process of identifying racially diverse gifted students continues to be disproportionate to their white peers. Achievements testing scores are not the best indicators of determining cognitive ability. Multiple measures should be instituted along with non-verbal assessments for students to demonstrate their cognitive abilities. Teacher referrals for gifted screening is another area of interest to be considered when devising a more culturally responsive and appropriate way to screen for need of gifted services. Preconceived biases and stereotypes of behavioral indicators lead to more racially diverse gifted students being tested for learning disabilities rather than exceptionalities. Awareness of the values and norms various cultures hold to high esteem need to be understood by all educational stakeholders to properly identify racially diverse students. The educational system becoming more inclusive and partnering with parents and the community could help to alter the attitudes various cultures have developed towards participating in gifted education programs. Additionally, training and instituting diverse and inclusive teaching practices bridges the gap for these students to find meaning and value in the educational process.

From the educational perspective, constructivist learning theory lends itself to developing a learning environment where racially diverse students can thrive. It promotes self-discovery through active learning and encourages students to formulate their own conclusions by working together with other students, using critical thinking skills to promote collaborative learning. This style of learning allows students to scaffold their learning and find context and meaning that provides connections based on their individual backgrounds. Racially diverse students can thrive in this supportive and challenging environment while building positive relationships with peers and gaining a greater appreciation for diversity.

Critical race theory has emerged as an essential element necessary when working with racially diverse students in the educational setting as well. Acknowledging implicit biases and celebrating cultural diversity can bring understanding and appreciation of the stories all cultures have but often are not represented in schools. Again, teacher training becomes an integral part of transforming the practices while encouraging students to embrace their cultures and respect the differences of all students. The stories of all cultures need to be represented in the curriculum so that students see history and learn about the value of diversity within society. When students connect to their learning, they find value and produce greater effort in their learning.

While cultural understanding promotes student success, so does the implementation of social cognitive theory to support the psychological aspects of racially diverse students. Being able to observe others, reflect upon these observations, and alter behaviors to self-regulate impacts social and emotional growth. To integrate this process into the curriculum, teaching students about the science of the brain enables them to understand the role emotions play in their decision making and the ways they can use reflective thinking to learn and grow. Students learn they are able to improve through their effort and by mastering coping mechanisms, they are able to face challenging tasks. Building resilience allows students to find success beyond their intelligence. It integrates the use of problem solving to develop psychological and educational resilience.

Self-determination theory works in conjunction with social cognitive theory when working with racially diverse students. Helping these students find autonomy where they feel competent through academic success encourages students to enhance their intrinsic motivation to learn. Building relationships within a learning environment helps students feel connected and supported to empower them to pursue their intellectual and creative interests. The positive feedback received in this environment cultivates resilience and yields positive academic success with future endeavors.

Educational systems need to be aware of the challenges racially diverse gifted students face. The intersectionality of intelligence, race, culture, and belief in oneself to succeed requires teacher preparation programs, staff development, curriculum review, parental and community partnerships to develop the support systems these exceptional students require to reach their fullest potential. It is imperative that as the demographics of schools continue to change, that schools systematically review, develop, and implement research-based practices for teaching racially diverse gifted students. The school system has an ethical obligation to assist these students in reaching their highest potential in order for them to become the future leaders of our communities and nation.

***About the Author***

Tammy McDonald is currently a Gifted Education Support Specialist at East Hills Middle School in the Bethlehem Area School District, Bethlehem, PA. She completed her bachelor’s degree in Psychology/Education from Muhlenberg College. McDonald has spent 28 years teaching a variety of subjects at the middle school level while earning several graduate degrees and certifications. She earned her first Master’s Degree in Education from Kutztown University and a second Master’s Degree from Wilkes University in Educational Technology. She also completed an endorsement in Gifted Education from Millersville University and her Administrative Certification from Marywood University. It is in the area of gifted education where she truly found her passion for teaching. She enjoys challenging students to expand their critical, creative, and problem solving skills. McDonald also contributes to the mission of the school district to Ignite, Encourage, and Empower students by serving on several district level task force and program evaluation committees. McDonald has been the advisor to her school’s National History Day team, taking students to the national level of the competition seven times. She began a chapter of the National Junior Honor Society at the school and she has also served as an intramural coach, lead technology teacher, team leader, school treasurer, webmaster, and union representative throughout her career. McDonald is a life-long learner who places the best interests of her students as her top priority, and is currently a doctoral candidate seeking her PhD in Strategic Leadership and Administrative Studies from Marywood University.

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