Viewing Giftedness as a cultural prism

Carole Ruth Harris, Ed.D.
SYMBIOTIC RECIPROCITY

- Individual interacts with patterns
- Reciprocity is introduced
- Societal factors influence individuals
- Individual influences cultural environment
SYMBIOTIC RECIPROCITY

- INDIVIDUAL
- CULTURE

SYMBIOTIC RECIPROCITY

GIFTEDNESS = UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES AND CHANGE
SYMBIOTIC RECIPROCITY

- Internal and external perspectives constantly interact
- Understanding giftedness requires a derivative view of the way in which individual characteristics are perceived, defined, and encouraged within multiple dualities.
Understanding Giftedness Globally

- Culturally diverse and multilingual students who consistently use higher order thinking in the native language and who are occupied with learning the new language and a new set of cultural values and norms lack the experience to negotiate learning trajectories in another language, culture, belief system or artistic expression. This duality enforces mental borders and erects barriers to reciprocity.
Understanding Giftedness Globally

- Borders are opened with culturally responsive teaching
- Gifted individual gains a locus of control to alter perceptions
- Promote activation of innate ability
Psychological Factors

• Empathy
• Provides a foundation for creating a reciprocal energy
• Misinterpretation arises from preconceived ideas
Psychological Factors

- Empathetic people
- More likely to relate to people who come from other cultural groups
Cultural Factors

- Going back generations
- Imposition of cultural values without give and take results in a conflict-riddled dichotomy that discourages the emergence of giftedness culture
Cultural Factors

• This can be ameliorated through informal means of interaction

• Genuine friendship
Aesthetic Factors

- Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

- The gods must be crazy
Aesthetic Factors

- Kalahari bushman sees a gorgeous blond
- His reaction:
  - *He saw the ugliest thing he had ever seen*
  - *She was as pale as something that had crawled out of a dead log*
  - *Her hair was white and stringy so she must be very old*
  - *She was covering her body with cobwebs though it was a hot day*
  - *She was so big it would take all day to feed her*
• Conquering Spaniards in the New World encountered Mayan art writing

• It looked evil to them

• We perceive from our own understanding
Aesthetic Factors

• The interpretation of aesthetic standards and communication through the arts needs to be approached from the view within the culture

• The Sacred Bridge musical productions
• Inter-generational problems, linguistic differences, bicultural meanings and connotations, and identity issues
Rapid Technological Development

- A double-edged sword
- Cyberspace is neither a true open forum nor an equalizer
- Cultural gaps are pronounced in ways of sending and receiving verbal-linguistic signals and gestural-somatic signals.
Rapid Technological Development

- You cannot shrug, nod, or make or avoid eye contact when you are texting a message.
- Anglo-European or Western cultures communicate in low context with the focus more on verbal interaction.
Rapid Technological Development

• Asian and Hispanic cultures emphasize verbal communications less and rely more on gesture.

• Asian culture more often than not is an indication of respect even if what is being said is not understood.
Rapid Technological Development

- Contextual subtleties are not transmitted electronically
- In Micronesian culture, eye language has contextual meaning, signaling numerous ways of conveying messages without speaking
Linguistic Differences

- Gifted child is more apt to pick up a new language more quickly

- Utilizes colloquialisms presenting a false front

- Linguistic code-switching, a process that occurs when another language is interjected into communication patterns
Linguistic Differences

- The association has emotional content

- Young, and even adolescent children of two cultures, are in the process of developing these skills
Teachers need to interweave daily, common linguistic expression to classroom instruction and utilize the broader linguistic understanding.
Population Movement

- Europe’s aging population
- Xenophobia is on the rise
- Perception is that national identities are weakened
The activity of international movement is easily seen in the census data mapped by Parker & Yarnall (2012) from the migration policy institute.
Population Movement

- Ethnic groups are increasingly marginalized
- The gifted are affected more profoundly
- Resulting decrease in locus of control, in a new educational system while balancing the attributes and characteristics of giftedness that set them apart from other students.
Population Movement

- The needs of the gifted are frequently neglected.
- Teachers must acquire the knowledge to work in cooperation and collaboration with differently cultured families.
- Atmosphere of respect and understanding.
Cultural Erosion

• Involves dominant and subdominant cultures

• Contained environment has a strong existing culture with its own traditions along with superimposed factors
Cultural Erosion

• Within the classroom, the school society, and the larger society, the gifted child is indeed the minority culture

• The isolation and conflict multiply.

• The adult individual employs one of three strategies
Cultural Erosion

Strategies

• *Strategy A*: Eradicate completely all traces of his ethnic cultural background, in reverse, he may become a purist or revivalist who sees himself entirely as a person of his ethnic ancestry
Cultural Erosion

Strategies

- *Strategy B*: Ethnic alternation in which he is sometimes one or the other in terms of cultural identity
Cultural Erosion

Strategies

• *Strategy C:* A blend of two cultures as a mutual enrichment

• It is especially important to keep this in mind when servicing gifted children who exercise greater intensity
Economic Realities

• Many culturally different children live below the poverty line

• Children of poverty do not come to school with the range of vocabulary let alone amenities such as books, computers, family trips
Economic Realities

- Special projects frequently result in denial of interest

- Few children of poverty who also have cultural differences are recommended to gifted programs
Economic Realities

• Flip side of this coin illustrates the potential loss in talent if it goes unrecognized.

• Steep rise in earnings, with immigrant earnings upon arrival in the new country less than native earnings, to earnings that rise to 11% more than a native worker within 15 years.
Economic Realities

- During those 15 years, gifted children of the culturally different are likely to remain unidentified.
Overarching political rhetoric prefers to address the larger general education picture.

Stereotypical interpretation
Overarching political rhetoric addresses the larger general education picture

Children who have been traumatized by war and ethnic conflict
There are inequities in educational opportunity.

- Gender-related aspects of giftedness
Defining and Valuing Aspects of Giftedness in a Faceted World

- Males in such societies are subject to external pressures
- All intercultural journeys need to be defined, recognized, and valued for their differences as well
Gifted Individuals Expanding Parameters

- Exemplars of symbiotic reciprocity in gifted people

- Culturally different backgrounds who effected change in society or met success on a personal level.
Gifted Individuals Expanding Parameters

- Two categories: Gifted children with emerging potential and gifted adults who became role models for leadership
Gifted children: Emerging potential

Jessica: Jessica’s biographical account appears in *The new kids* (Hauser, 2011). Born in China, Jessica lived alone on a subsistence level while enrolled in a Brooklyn, NY high school for immigrant teens. Jessica received recognition and encouragement from her teacher and continued on to college where she continues to study hard and excels academically.
Gifted children: Emerging potential

- Yvonne* From Turkey, was “skimming” and underutilizing her abilities, received intervention and support for giftedness in seventh grade, began writing novels in high school and went on to early enrollment in an ivy league college
Gifted children: Emerging potential

- Allen*+ from China, raised in a bilingual traditional Chinese family, received intervention and became an international chess champion while in elementary school.

- Martin*+ from Palau, Micronesia, identified as gifted at age 9, went on to a US university and met success as a linguist.
Gifted children: Emerging potential

• Sam* + from the Marshall Islands, identified as gifted at age 8, found work as a diplomat in Geneva, Switzerland.

• Nellie* from a Greek family, identified and received intervention at age 6, went on to Massachusetts Institute of Technology where she excels academically.
Gifted children: Emerging potential

• Josh* from a French Canadian family, identified as gifted at age 4, appeared before the US Senate at age 7 to advocate for Federal action on laws for children with severe allergies.

• Pierre* from a Haitian family, identified as doubly exceptional at age 6, went on to win a scholarship and excel academically in a prestigious private school.
Gifted adults: Role models for leadership

- Abby* from the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, identified as gifted at age 13, became a senator after two children and an interrupted education.

- Priscilla* from Tonga, taught in the gifted program in the Marshall Islands, went on to a US college, earned a Master’s degree, and became a coordinator of mathematics programs in a large, culturally diverse inner city US school district.
Gifted adults: Role models for leadership

- Peter* from the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, taught in the gifted program and went on to the University of Guam where he earned his Ph.D., returning home to be elected a senator.

- Hahn: Hahn is a victim of AIDS. After her little daughter died of AIDS she founded the Immortal Flower Group, an organization to help other victims, including children who are marginalized in Vietnamese society because of the disease (Capello, 2008). A born organizer, she is able to get grants and has become a public advocate for other victims who along with their infected children are unable or unwilling to speak for themselves.
Gifted adults: Role models for leadership

• Nada: Nada, from Bosnia, started an agricultural cooperative after the war, bringing former enemies together in a country still suffering from the effects of the Bosnia-Herzegovinian conflict (Capello, 2008). She works alongside Kravica, who is a Serb, and is active in providing a vehicle for improving the lives of women and children left alone and destitute after the war.
Madame Urbain: Founder of APAF (Association to Promote Aid to Families) in Mali, Madame Urbain raises awareness about the importance of educating girls and empowering them with knowledge (Capello, 2008). She also actively advocates for ending female circumcision, a dangerous and cruel practice that all too frequently results in irreparable physical and psychological damage.
Gifted adults: Role models for leadership

Madeleine: Madeleine Albright, from Prague, Czech Republic when it was still Czechoslovakia, became the first US female secretary of state, is now active in *Connect and Commit*, an organization dedicated to providing educational opportunities for promising students in disadvantaged societies. She sends you a message and asks that you also connect and commit.
Conclusions

- Symbiotic reciprocity, the give and take and mingling of cultures, blossoms into new growth as the gifted and able of high ability infuse societies in a globally emergent view with new ideas and unique perspectives that bring about positive change powered by vision, intensity, and optimism.
Conclusions

• No one exists as a *tabula rasa*.

• We must first recognize that we are products of our environment.

• It is imperative that educators of the gifted go beyond recognition of cultural difference to deep understanding of its dynamics.
Conclusions

- You have been asked to connect and commit

- As active educators of the gifted you already have

- Fresh approach in a faceted world

- Offering great challenges and great opportunities to make a difference.
Guidelines

1. Be attentive to ability that is hidden in the language of the classroom but emerges in the native language.

2. Define giftedness in terms of the sending as well as the receiving culture.

4. Cultivate empathetic understanding with frequent personal communication.

5. Encourage socialization and understanding through participation in extra-curricular activities that promote understanding and tolerance such as sport and the arts.
Guidelines

6. Be aware of the power of aesthetic experiences to ease inter cultural understanding.

7. Be aware of family attitudes towards giftedness, cultural integration, academic achievement, and design intervention to accommodate its parameters.
8. Watch for culturally grounded body language and gesture that goes beyond speaking, writing, listening, and means of communication through technology.

9. Be alert to code-switching when conducting assessment procedures or giving assignments.
10. Work in collaboration with differently cultured families to clarify areas of identification and intervention and ensure that both are transparent, understood to work towards positive outcomes.

11. Avoid cultural damaging erosion by demonstrating respect for the original culture and ethnicity.
Guidelines

12. Be aware of isolating factors in giftedness and cultural difference to defuse masking and superficial adjustment.

13. Be sensitive to economic realities in struggling, newly arrived families that have little means to participate in enrichment activities.
Guidelines

14. Negotiate political sensitivities by eliciting multiple points of view and recognize that children often assume the political stance effected in the home.

15. Address gender inequities in global society through role models of gifted adults in a wide spectrum of cultures.