

Tempo

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ATYPICAL GIFTED

UNDERSTANDING THE DIVERSITY OF THE GIFTED

Bertie Kingore and Lynlee Rinard
Illustrated by Jeff Kingore
Abilene, TX

Being gifted is like having a really nice car. But the environment in which you drive affects your forward momentum.

- The gifted from a nurtured, enriched background has the car with an outside accessory package. Everyone can see, admire, and serve the talents.
- The low-socioeconomic status gifted has the car, but may not yet have the keys to drive it.
- The highly gifted or prodigy gifted has the car but may only be allowed to drive it within the city limits and must follow all the usual traffic signs, such as *slow*, *caution*, *speed limit*, and *stop*.
- The underachieving gifted has the car, but is not driving it. It remains parked in the garage.
- The primary gifted has the car, but is considered too young to drive it.
- The language-different gifted has the car, but the signs and directions are in another language so it cannot go anywhere.
- The ADD/ADHD gifted has the car, but the electrical ignition system is wired differently so it stays in motion when others want it to stop.
- The culturally-diverse gifted has the car, but it has a shrink-wrapped cover over it which clouds its potential.

(See KINGORE, page 6)

IDENTIFICATION OF HISPANIC, BILINGUAL, GIFTED STUDENTS

by Rafael Lara-Alecio, Beverly Irby, and
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College Station, TX

According to the Center for Demographic and Socioeconomic Research and Education in the Department of Rural Sociology at Texas A&M University (1996), Texas' population is changing rapidly and substantially - with projections pointing to continued growth, diversity, and social concerns. By 2030, the state's population will be 33.8 million which is an increase of 99% over 1990. Of this increase, 72% is projected to be due to immigrants from other states and from other nations.

By 2030 in Texas, Anglos are expected to increase by 20.4%; African-Americans by 62%, Hispanics by 257.6%, and all other ethnicities by 648.4%. Of the total population in Texas by the year 2030, Anglos will represent 36.7% and Hispanics, 45.9%. By the same year, of the total net change of the State's population, 87.5% is projected to be due to minority population growth.

The Fate of the Hispanic Bilingual Gifted Student

By 2030, two million more students will be enrolled in Texas' elementary and secondary schools. This suggests that more students will be identified and placed in gifted education programs. What, then, is the fate of Hispanic-bilingual-gifted student (HBGS) identification and placement in gifted programs? With the growth of the Hispanic population, one would expect to see rising numbers of Hispanic students in gifted programs. If the pattern of the past eight years is maintained there is a question regarding positive results of this expectation. Ortíz and González (1989) testified in a report from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights that minority groups such as Hispanic, African Americans, and Native Americans are underrepresented in gifted programs by as much as 70%. More recently, an analysis of enrollment data by the Austin American Statesman (Associated Press, 1996) reports that Hispanic students are four times less likely than Anglo students to be placed in gifted programs.

Since there are gifted students in all realms of society, it behooves educators to develop programs

which are designed for all groups. It is surprising that our field has not been more assertive in developing more inclusive screening, identification, and curriculum programs. Perhaps the fate of Hispanic-bilingual-gifted students lies in the hands of current teachers of the gifted. It is important to make educators of the gifted aware of the characteristics of Hispanic-bilingual-gifted students so that these teachers can more adequately assist in identification of and/or more effectively serve this group of students.

Attributes of Hispanic-Bilingual-Gifted Students

In our research (Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1995), 11 clusters of attributes of potentially gifted Hispanic-bilingual elementary students were identified. A discussion of those clusters and attributes follows.

Cluster 1, Motivation for Learning, suggests that HBGS's demonstrate a value for education through good school attendance. Additionally, they exhibit a desire for learning, are persistent, and have a sustained motivation to succeed in school. Motivation to learn was also found among characteristics of Hispanic gifted students in a study of community perceptions conducted by Márquez, Bermúdez, and Rakow (1992).

Cluster 2, Social and Academic Language, assays verbal precocity among HGBS's considered in our study and indicates that they not only like to read, speak, listen, and write in their native language, but they also achieve well in those areas. This supports findings from early studies on English speaking gifted students where it was determined that these students were not only good readers, but that they also displayed a keen interest in reading (Hollingsworth, 1926; Stedman, 1924; Strang, 1963; Terman, 1925; Terman & Oden, 1947). A more recent study by Márquez, Bermúdez, and Rakow (1992) found that the Hispanic community also perceives gifted children within that community as having an interest in reading. There is general consensus through observational data that gifted children have a propensity toward superior verbal behaviors that are expressive, elaborate, and fluent

(Renzulli & Hartman, 1971). The results of our study support similar observations among Hispanic students and their exceptional abilities to verbally express themselves in their native language. Additionally, our study reports new findings in which gifted or potentially gifted, Hispanic bilingual students are rated by their teachers as being good listeners and good writers in their native language.

Cluster 3, Cultural Sensitivity, suggests an expressed and observable appreciation for the Hispanic culture among the Hispanic-bilingual-gifted and potentially gifted students. Characteristics observed and included under Cultural Sensitivity were (a) pride in their language and/or culture, respect for traditional cultural and linguistic patterns and (b) a value for oral tradition and history of the native culture. Additionally, this cluster revealed an item which indicates the students have an openness toward those who embrace their culture and the language no matter what nationality. This cluster is an important finding because it addresses the critical aspect of culture, which is often lacking among other traditional screening instruments as pointed out by Cohen (1988) and Bermúdez and Rakow (1990).

Cluster 4, Familial, identified eight characteristics. Strong maternal and paternal role models were observed among these students, as well as strongly observed interpersonal relations among family members. Additionally, the students exhibited a "caretaker" personality within the family. This is supported by a study conducted by Ebener (1995) in which he found that high-achieving Hispanic students often take over interpretative caretaker roles between the home and school or community. Parents were perceived to demonstrate strong emotional support for these children and to participate in school functions. These parents were possibly afforded more opportunities to be participative in school functions due to the teachers' observations that their students have smaller family units (usually less than 3 children).

It was determined that HBGS's display respect for authority figures. Additionally, they were observed having meaningful transactions with adults. According to Perrone and Aleman (1983) and Cohen (1988), the strong family and adult relationships and respect for authority figures that are exhibited among the general Hispanic population may be perceived as a non-gifted trait, since gifted identification scales tend to equate non-conformity toward authority and independent thought with superior abilities (Renzulli, Hartman, and Callahan, 1971).

The Familial Cluster represents critical findings that consider the relevancy of family structures within the Hispanic culture and among these children.

Cluster 5, Collaboration, focused on 13 items that dealt with the students' abilities to lead and work with others in a cooperative nature. Included characteristics were (a) good at setting goals; (b) has a keen sense of justice and quickly perceives injustice; (c) is able to categorize or judge events and people; (d) has good social adjustment — well-accepted by peers and sensitive to personal relationships; (e) possesses leadership qualities in relation to working in the peer group — works well with others; (f) participates in school activities and class discussions, and (g) interacts with peers from other ethnic groups. The ability to judge events and people is also found among the mainstream gifted children (Renzulli, Hartman, and Callahan, 1971). Good social adjustment and sensitivity to personal relationships are two traits among Mexican-Americans that are supportive of earlier findings reported by Bernal (1974).

Additional characteristics in this cluster were: (a) indirect at giving criticism — avoids conflict — likes to please and is sensitive to the opinions of others (The avoidance of conflict possibly emanates from the conforming behavior discussed under Cluster 4, while sensitivity toward others' opinions is a trait that is supportive of Bernal's (1974) findings.); (b) has a special sensitivity to the needs of society (Like many mainstream gifted children, the findings of our study indicate that the HBGS is also sensitive to world needs and is good at giving advice (Renzulli, Hartman, and Callahan, 1971)); (c) responds favorably to typical classroom motivators and rewards or awards; (d) is patient; and (e) is good at giving advice and judgements in disputes and in planning strategies.

Cluster 6, Imagery, included three characteristics that were aligned with the verbal precocity of HBGC's. They tended to exhibit language (spoken and written) rich in imagery and appeared to be imaginative in storytelling. This finding supports Marquez, Bermudez, and Rakow's (1992) findings on Hispanic-limited-English-proficient students from the community perspective where they determined that these students tended to be creative and had abilities in written and oral expression, as well in storytelling. Being able to image or aptly describe an event or story in the native language and to make it vivid and alive were characteristics that the bilingual teachers in our study perceived to be traits in their HBGS's.

Cluster 7, Achievement, revealed that the academic giftedness perceived among HBGS's is multifaceted in nature. Not only were academic virtues reported as often exhibited, but also achievement branched into more intrapersonal cognitive domains. The characteristics follow: (a) has the ability to use stored knowledge to solve problems; (b) has the ability to generalize learning to other areas and to show relationships among apparently unrelated ideas; (c) performs at or above grade level in math -- like to do math problems; (d) talents are demonstrated through various projects and interests at home or in the community; (e) is self-directed in activities; (f) perceives cause and effect relationships; (g) is curious -- always investigating or asking questions and likes to take risks; (h) tends to prefer novelty, personal freedom, and distinctiveness; (i) the level of competency between learning and language is consistent; (j) has a working command of Spanish as well as English; (k) has an entrepreneurial ability; (l) has a rich sense of humor; and (m) uses intuition. Many of these characteristics were also observed among mainstream gifted students (Renzulli, Hartman, and Callahan, 1971; Parke, 1989), with the exception of the working command of Spanish and English.

An additional observed characteristic was -- reasons by analogy or contrast -- which may be loosely linked to DeLeon's research (1983) that indicated when Hispanic children are asked to reason, they tend to give answers in relation to their social context, thus making analogies through the personal, cultural perspective.

A final characteristic found in this cluster, not to be confused with a lack of organization or interest, was that HBGS's may not complete one task before going to another. Furthermore, they tended to complete tasks in their own time.

Cluster 8, Creative Performance, was concerned with attributes that dealt with the students' creative productivity in the arts. These items tend to mirror Torrance's findings (1970) regarding disadvantaged, minority gifted students in that they are adept in visual/performing arts and are talented in music, art, or drama. Additionally, HBGS's exhibited creativity in movement, dance, and other physical activities. The teachers perceived them to be creative in lyric production to songs with more creativity exhibited in groups.

Cluster 9, Support, addressed five perceived attributes. Vocabulary was perceived to be better developed in the native language; therefore, these

children, like all second language learners, need continued support in the acquisition of the second language. It is important to note the need for continued support in second language acquisition among HBGS's especially because there may be a tendency for teachers and administrators to perceive that because these students are gifted they may not need continued support. Acquisition of a second language is a complex process, especially when it is seen from the academic perspective (Lara-Alecio and Parker, 1994).

Additionally, the children were perceived to respond favorably and perform better when the teachers' expressed confidence in their abilities. Two final items included in this cluster were: (a) the teachers perceived the children to have one academic area of primary interest (indicates a need for teachers to support this area, but enrich the students academic environment), and (b) the teachers also perceive the students to prefer alternative assessments as opposed to standardized assessments (indicates that teachers need to use multiple assessment and evaluation tools with students).

Cluster 10, Problem Solving, included items that dealt with actions and cognitive function in solving problems. Within this cluster, two of the items dealt with individual versus group problem solving. The students were perceived as being social in groups and as participating in extracurricular activities. In cognitive functions, the students were identified as global learners who completed tasks in a patient, non-hurried, yet effective and accurate manner. In a previously described cluster, HBGS's were observed as moving from one task to another, yet getting all tasks completed in their own timeframe. In conjunction with the students' curiosity and methodological manner for task completion, HBGS's were observed to enjoy and achieve well in science, a subject that is both investigatory and methodological in nature. They were also perceived to perform better on spatial fluency tasks as opposed to verbal fluency tasks and to exhibit high nonverbal fluency and originality (this is also related to Cluster 8, Creative Performance).

Cluster 11, Locus of Control, included various attributive items dealing with differing internal/external controlling concepts. Locus of Control is generally defined as controlling factors one attributes to his/her own actions (internal) or to actions directed toward the individual (external) (Rotter, 1971). HBGS's have an internal locus of control. For example, those items that suggested internal locus of control were: (a) exhibits good self-

concept and self-confidence; (b) is trustworthy and has responsible social behavior and well-developed social skills; (c) acts naturally and does not consciously imitate others; (d) completes homework assignments (indicates a desire to reinforce self); (e) has good test-taking skills (possibly indicates a keen sense of observation of expectations in the mainstream society and a desire to meet those expectations); and (f) has the ability to meaningfully manipulate symbolism in his/her own culture (possesses abilities to personally manipulate symbolism -- do not allow symbols of the culture to externally manipulate him/her; for example, "Que todo tenemos un destino y que no podemos modificarlo. Tratar de hacerlo es ir en contra de la voluntad de Dios," is a symbol expressing that destiny is something in life with which we cannot contend, but these children are perceived to be able to manipulate that symbol and understand it in context). Other loosely clustered items included were: (a) learns better through social interaction than through isolation and is more cooperative than competitive, and (b) reasons in a step-by-step process rather than spontaneous.

These findings are critical in the ongoing struggle to identify and serve one of the largest minority groups in Texas. It is even more critical when considering a recent evaluation of Texas programs for the gifted where it was determined that in many cases there is little or no match between the programmatic services being provided and the districts' plan of identification (Irby, Henderson, & Berry, 1992). Traditional evaluation instruments, purporting to measure intelligence and achievement, have been deemed inappropriate for minority or culturally diverse students (DeLeon, 1983; Markheady, Towne, and Algozinne, 1983; Renzulli, 1970).

There is a need for a valid, reliable, practical, unbiased Hispanic-bilingual-gifted screening instrument that has the potential to even initially place these children into a pool of candidates for service in gifted education programs. The development of effective screening instruments is critical, because of the initial screening instruments of culturally different students are not inclusive of appropriate, operational definitions or characteristics of giftedness a particular ethnic group, then, as Bernal (1981) determined, students will continue to be denied access to programs through their inability to move beyond the screening phase. We are concerned here with the initial point of referral; more quantitative and qualitative research needs to be conducted in the area of final identification techniques for this population.

Suggestions for Teachers of the Gifted

At this point there are some actions that can be taken by teacher of the gifted. First, they must know, understand, and share the characteristics determined significant among this population with teachers in bilingual education and with Hispanic parents of the potentially gifted students on their campuses. A collaborative partnership between the teacher of the gifted and the bilingual teacher on a campus must be established. In some cases, bilingual teachers have the state required hours to teach gifted children within the bilingual setting. In that case, it is important for the bilingual gifted teacher to share these characteristics with the other bilingual staff members.

Other activities, based upon the characteristics, in which teachers of the gifted may engage to support Hispanic-bilingual-gifted students are as follows:

1. Conduct supportive conversations with students which indicate that we are living in a society that rewards education.
2. Have these students to find outstanding people, living or non-living, from their own culture who have contributed to the society and then develop a "Wall of Fame" or "Un Umbral de Fama."
3. Lead students through an action research project in job market economics where they investigate the job market, future job market, and determine relationships between education, quality of jobs, and income levels.
4. Support the students with resources and encouragement to continue his/her endeavors.
5. Provide activities for developing social and academic language proficiency.
6. Provide the students with motivational native language books selected according to their reading ability; have a good selection of above-grade-level reading books in the native language in the classroom.
7. Provide the students with meaningful writing activities, such as technical report writing of a personal research project, creative writing that includes an analysis of a story from varying perspectives — the author's or various characters', poetry, story-writing, or letter writing for specific purposes.

Provide the students with tapes in their native language. The tapes could be musical lyrics with students having to interpret the meaning of the lyrics. Other tapes could be of native language poetry being read.

Provide the students with time to speak in his/her native language. Special meetings could be arranged where students may share ideas, discuss current events, or set up debates for developing speaking abilities.

0. Have students interview grandparents and older relatives to develop a family history booklet for publication.

These are only a few suggestions that gifted educators can implement in the school and with the families of Hispanic-bilingual-gifted students. Many other ideas could be generated by the gifted teacher, bilingual teachers, and parents based on characteristics of this population.

Conclusions

It is of great importance that teachers of the gifted become aware of the characteristics of Hispanic-bilingual-gifted students and become advocates for them by educating administrators, bilingual and mainstream teachers, and parents, as well as society, in general. It is necessary that they, above all, remember that the exclusion of this Hispanic group of underidentified and underserved children in programs for the gifted has three main implications. First, it sends a negative message to this underrepresented population in district gifted programs. It implies that they are somehow less able than those in other populations. Opinions such as "there are just no gifted minorities" or "minority children are in need of academic remediation, particularly those who are limited English proficient" are common even among teachers who work with these populations (Davis & Rimm, 1989).

Second, the very act of exclusion is contradictory to the American principles of egalitarianism (Gintis, 1988). The task of providing equitable service for the gifted is made more difficult by the lack of uniformity in objective identification procedures and in appropriate needs-based curriculum services. Uniformity does not preclude the use of a multi-dimensional approach to the identification of giftedness. When reviewing evaluations of programs for the gifted it was determined that in many cases there is little or no match between the programmatic services being provided and the districts' plan of identifica-

tion (Irby, Henderson, and Berry, 1992). The first step in the identification process is to provide valid, reliable, practical, and unbiased screening instruments that are ecologically based on the population to be identified and served. To screen minority students using mainstream instruments based on perceptions of general giftedness and to serve those minority students in similar capacities using mainstream gifted curriculum and instruction is exclusionary.

Third, practitioners must be advocates for changes in the identification procedures and programmatic services that respond to the characteristics of the Hispanic-bilingual-gifted students. Curriculum and instruction cannot be discussed, developed, or delivered in isolation of the conceptualization of giftedness of the particular ethnic group being served. Finally, a screening process is necessary as well as an effective curriculum and instruction that is sensitive to the characteristics or attributes of the Hispanic-bilingual-gifted student population.

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