

Case Studies of Culturally Diverse Gifted Children

Case Study 1- Richard

Richard is a very independent, African-American male student. He is a fourth grader at a rural elementary school and has been identified to be a part of the school's gifted education program due to his history as a highly successful student. He is from a lower socio-economic status and his mother is minimally involved in his schooling. His older sister (a high school student) is often the one to step in when parental assistance is needed. Richard is gifted in both reading and math, but his preferred subject is reading. Though very confident in himself, he is also very concerned about his social status amongst his peers, wanting to be "cool" and popular. Thus, he consistently only gives the minimum effort required to completing assigned tasks with a solid grade. When he comes to school with his homework incomplete, he willingly and without care, accepts the consequences. He is also on the school's 4th grade Battle of the Books team, just barely meeting the requirements to remain a team member. He often isolates himself from the other team members (all girls) and refuses to engage in discussions to answer battle questions unless he already knows the answer, otherwise sitting in silence, refusing to offer any input. Teacher re-direction on the Battle of the Books team, as well as the classroom is often met with attitude by Richard.

Case Study 2- Sandra

Sandra is a Hispanic, female student. She is a fourth grader at a rural elementary school and has been identified to be a part of the school's gifted education program due to her history as a highly successful student. She is bilingual, still remains in the ESL program, and comes from a lower socio-economic status. Her parents try their best to be involved in her education at

home, but have only minimal involvement in relation to being present for school events, conferences, etc. This is, in part, due to the language barrier, but also due to both parents working factory jobs with strict hours. Sandra is gifted in both reading and math. Her preferred subject is reading, though she actually scores better in math class. Sandra has many friends in school, and is very outgoing and self-confident. But her strong sense of respect for self and authority greatly outweighs her allegiances to her friends. She is independent, an extremely hard worker and aims to please in all that she does. Though not necessarily a perfectionist, she consistently gives her best and only turns in quality work. She is not a good test-taker and often struggles to perform well on tests. Low scores often upset her, but she is quick to ask for help in order to understand and improve. Sandra is on the school's 4th grade Battle of the Books team. Just as in the classroom, she works very hard to be a productive team member, and keep her spot on the team.

Analysis

Given their backgrounds as African-American and Hispanic American students respectively, both from a low socioeconomic status, and both living in a poor, rural of North Carolina, it seems that Richard and Sandra have both beaten the odds by even being identified as gifted and talented. According to Chapter 13, page 260 of *Education of the Gifted and Talented*, the author says that “culturally different and economically disadvantaged African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, and Caucasian children, living in large urban centers, in underprivileged rural areas, and on Indian reservations are identified less frequently as gifted or talented” (Rimm, Siegle & Davis, 2018). However, it is likely that they were both identified as gifted due to some of the characteristics they exhibited that are considered to be

“typical” of gifted students. One typical characteristic of giftedness clearly exhibited by both students is the sense of independence they exhibit. Related, they are also both highly confident. Rimm, Siegle, and Davis purport that these attributes and attitude are “a natural outgrowth of years of favorable comparisons with less-able peers... and from the child’s clear history of success in school” (Rimm, Siegle, and Davis, 2018, page 28). Richard and Sandra also share a high level of comprehension, not only evidenced by their consistently high grades in the classroom, but also through their membership on the Battle of the Books team- a highly competitive, academic activity requiring advanced comprehension of 15 novels. In the article *Common and domain-specific cognitive characteristics of gifted students: an integrated model of human abilities*, the authors suggest: “When gifted students demonstrate knowledge of an unusual number of relationships through high curiosity and high intensity, they may show exceptional comprehension or learning abilities in their domains” (Song & Porath, 2005). These two students have undoubtedly exhibited this in the classroom, as well as in their extra-curricular involvement.

In Chapter 31 of *Fundamentals of Gifted Education*, it is stated that “Academically talented boys more often attribute their successes to ability and their failures to lack of effort... In contrast, in some studies, academically talented girls attribute their successes to effort or luck and their failures to lack ability” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, page 356). This quite accurately applies to both Richard and Sandra, and appears to be typical for gifted males and gifted females, respectively. As stated in the case study of Richard, he often lacks effort in completing his work. Through the attitude he exhibits when facing the consequences of this, he understands that those consequences were due to his lack of effort, but never questions his

ability in the face of failure. Rather, he accepts those consequences willingly. In the case of Sandra, she upsets easily in the face of a low score, perhaps questioning her ability, and then seeks to work hard to understand and improve for next time.

As a gifted African-American male, Richard likely “feels peer pressure if [he] participates in a pullout program”, according to Rimm, Siegle, and Davis (2018, page 274). This, as well as the typical stereotype of gifted students as nerds or geeks, may contribute to his desire for popularity amongst his friends. His desire for popularity may also be due to the “acting white hypothesis” in which he is essentially faced with the choice of “being Black” or being a good student and a high achiever (Callahan & Hertberg Davis, 2018, page 390). Research by Bonner, Lewis, Bowman-Perrott, and Hill-Jackson also highlights the importance of recognizing this phenomenon in our African American students: “A prime example of how the intersection and overlap of academic, cultural, and racial identity can impact the development of gifted African American male students is seen in how they address perceptions about their achievement. For this cohort, achievement can be impacted by perceptions of being smart as somehow inferring that they are “acting White” (Bonner, Lewis, Bowman-Perrott, & Hill-Jackson, 2009).

As a gifted Latina student, Sandra faces her own difficulties as an English Language Learner. Though she is very close to being able to pass the exam to exit the ESL program, she remains there for now. Occasionally this slight linguistic deficit impacts her classroom performance, thus necessitating some forms of scaffolding such as additional time for some assignments (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, page 408). This performance impact is noted in her occasional low test scores. Sandra, though, is quite unlike her Latino peers in that she has already been identified and placed into the gifted program despite her language barrier, unlike

many of her peers for which language and culture has been a barrier to gifted identification (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, page 406). The author of *The "Invisible" Gifted and Talented Bilingual Students: A Current Report in Enrollment in GT Programs* suggests that schools tend to focus more on closing the language deficit with students like Sandra, in turn leaving a growing deficit in their academic vocabulary. "Therefore, educational institutions must address all the academic needs of bilingual students to ensure that their talents are identified and developed" (Esquierdo and Arreguin-Anderson, 2012).

A child's culture carries many implications for identification and service. In the case of both students early identification is one of the most important components, as students stand a better chance of being at the top of their sub-group at that point in their education (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, page 391). For Sandra, due to her linguistic barrier, even more important is the use of multiple criteria in the identification process- especially a non-verbal measure, in addition to a teacher checklist of characteristics (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, page 406-407). Realistically though, the use of multiple criteria is important in the identification of any student, especially within culturally diverse subgroups. Callahan and Hertberg-Davis propose that this is also crucial to African Americans: "Given that relying heavily on teacher recommendations in the referral process risks disadvantaging capable African American students in the identification process, it appears critical to include other nomination and referral methods in the identification process" (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, page 401).

Another crucial factor that impacts service of underserved populations such as those of Sandra and Richard is parent involvement. Especially in cases where there is little parental involvement in the home, Rimm, Siegle, and Davis argue that this need is even greater. In

African-American culture, this is due to the idea that “they are more likely to assist their children and contribute to the G/T program if they do not see the program as elitist” (2018, page 277). In Latino culture, the need for parental involvement stems from parents being intimidated by the education system (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, page 409). Regardless, gifted education must have parental support to be successful. Additionally, there is argument that implies that parents play an important role in the identification process for their students such that the differing roles of parents according to the culture from which they come may be in part to blame for the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic children in gifted programs. This idea is also supported by research done on teacher perceptions of gifted Hispanic LEP students: “Parents of Hispanic LEP students could help supply pertinent information about their children that may be overlooked by the teacher” (Fernandez, Gay, Lucky & Reyes Gavilan, 1998). Resultingly, the researcher suggests “the identification of minority students might be enhanced through a public education program which alerted parents to those characteristics which might indicate giftedness and which informed them about the availability and function of educational programs for gifted students” (Scott, Perou, Urbano, Hogan, & Gold, 1992).

Of utmost importance to the service of these culturally diverse students is making sure their teachers have training in both gifted education, as well as multicultural education. It is crucial to have an understanding of the stereotypes and biases one holds, especially as a teacher. In order to teach these students well, one must “become culturally responsive, creating a culture that supports all students regardless of race, economic status, gender, or religion” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, page 401). In the case of Richard, this type of cultural sensitivity is especially important in order to build a positive relationship with him, such

that he is more responsive to feedback in the classroom about his work. African American students, in general tend to less trusting of Caucasian teachers and do not respond well to negative feedback about their work (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, page 395). An awareness of this on the part of the teacher can create a more trusting environment through giving more specific feedback with less focus on the criticisms, and more focus on how to improve.

Though the study of students like Richard and Sandra provide us important insights as to how to ensure that these students are fairly identified and served in gifted education programs, it is important to note that the practices one would put into place to better serve them, as well as other African American and Latino students are the very practices that would serve any student well, regardless of culture. Despite the many, many ways that a teacher can ensure these culturally diverse students are served well, teacher training and awareness, working towards greater parental involvement, and using a multi-faceted approach to student identification are arguably among the most important factors that could create a more equitable environment in gifted education for these students. As teachers, we must see to it that all students, regardless of their background or culture, have a fair chance at being identified and served in gifted education.

Works Cited

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