



# A Counselor Educator Situates Two Seminal Studies in the Cultural Values and Underrepresentation Literature 30 Years Later

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## Abstract

Emerging themes in a qualitative study of dominant-culture teachers' beliefs about giftedness in the late 1990s reflected that behavior, verbal assertiveness, family status, a strong work ethic, and social skills mattered most. In a similar study in five culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) communities at that time, themes differed collectively from the teachers', but also from community to community. Findings are pertinent to the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted-education programs currently because teachers continue to be gatekeepers when asked to refer students for programs. What they and the students value matters. The research approach is also of interest. The methods used in these studies were effective for exploring teachers' invisible ad hoc rationale when nominating students for special programs, and the findings provoke thought about why underrepresentation remains so intractable. The findings are examined here, nearly 30 years after data collection, with implications for policy, philosophy, selection, and programming.

**Keywords:** *underrepresentation • culturally and linguistically diverse • post-positivistic • qualitative*

For several decades, with considerable momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars have explored the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children and teens in school programs for high-ability students. An extensive report of the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Racial Disparities (2012) called attention to possible contributing factors: within-culture immigrant differences; economic disparities affecting quality and access to early-childhood education; dual-language learning not continued beyond the first years of schooling; the intersection of gender and race; teacher-student interaction; and differing academic experiences of English speakers (ES) and English Language Learners (ELLs). More recently, pertinent articles in *Gifted Child Quarterly* (e.g., Henfield et al., 2017; Peters, 2021; Peters et al., 2019; and Ricciardi et al., 2020) and frequent briefs in the National Association for Gifted Children online *News Source* (e.g., Watanabe, 2022) about inequitable identification and participation indicate that concerns about underrepresentation continue. Qualitative exploration of those concerns and of affected demographic entities, letting examination of language make visible what often is invisible, can scratch beneath the surface.

## Sensitizing Literature

Representative scholarship from the 1970s through the early 2000s, organized in somewhat chronological order

below, suggest that scholars have explored and discussed an array of aspects of underrepresentation. Those include, but are not limited to, conceptions of giftedness (Renzulli, 1978; Sternberg & Davidson, 1986); minority status in plural communities (Ogbu, 1983); impact of teachers' emotional responses to students' abilities, success, and failure on student achievement (Weiner et al., 1982); identifying and serving ELLs (Crawford, 1995); applying the theory of multiple intelligences to identification (Baldwin, 1994); improving academic achievement by ameliorating behavior problems (Tucker, 1999); impact of socio-economic status on self-concept (Campbell-Whatley & Comer, 2000); and impact of teachers' experiences with race on curriculum development and implementation (Milner & Ford, 2005).

In the past decade, examples of additional foci are the importance of mattering (i.e., feeling valued) (Dixon & Tucker, 2018), recruitment and retention of culturally different students (Ford et al., 2020); a broader understanding of learning preferences (Samardzija & Peterson, 2015); underrepresentation of high-achieving students of color in programs (e.g., Grissom & Redding, 2016); proactive efforts toward equity during identification (Peters & Engerrand, 2020); cluster grouping (Gentry, 2021b); students' racial narratives related to ability (Shah, 2017); demographics of underrepresentation (Peters et al., 2019); small-group affective curriculum for facilitating connections among high-ability CLD youth (Jen et al., 2017); and the notion of learning *from* indigenous students (Gentry & Gray, 2021). Among relatively recent perspectives, cluster grouping (Gentry, 2021a), with frequent or continual assessment, grouping and regrouping, individualized feedback, and a high level of curriculum

differentiation, focuses on progress and improvement, not just achievement, embracing CLD students.

## Theories

The persistence of the underrepresentation of CLD students in programs for high-ability children and teens argues that examining scholarly perspectives across even more decades might help to put it at arm's length to generate new insights. For example, Turner's (1960) perspectives about contest and sponsorship mobility are of interest. In the former, high status comes in an open contest, won by effort. In the latter, agents of an established elite "sponsor" recruits and make judgments based on specific qualities. Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) argued that U.S. selection processes reflect sponsorship mobility, with social-class membership affecting how the school system responds to students. Decision-makers differentiate on the basis of test-data interpretation, individual and family history, academic success or difficulty, personal adjustments, and clinical and common-sense conceptions.

Wilcox (1982), regarding differential socialization in the classroom, theorized that schools are transmitters, rather than reformers, of culture, through actions woven imperceptibly into everyday classroom life. She also referred to a culture of expectation, based on parents' achievements. Therefore, Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory that education reproduces society is also relevant. Referring to the use of testing in identification, they argued that "outward signs of scientificity and neutrality" (p. 163), providing a cloak of fairness, may be "concealing social selection under the guise of technical selection and legitimating the reproduction of social hierarchies by transmuting them into academic hierarchies" (p. 53). Even a teacher's concerns about whether a child would feel comfortable in a program may unwittingly perpetuate disparities if "fit" includes being comfortable with students already in the program.

## Biting to the Core

Regarding scholarly directions for addressing the underrepresentation of bright CLD children and teens in programs, Tannenbaum (1990) asserted, "After so many years of nibbling futilely at the edges of these issues, it is time to bite boldly into their bitter core" (p. 84). Borland (1993) noted that the sociology of classroom interaction and idiosyncratic value orientations had been ignored by scholars, as had contexts and constructs, such as the construct of giftedness. These perspectives encouraged changes in foci and research methods, such as using postpositivistic approaches instead of positivistic measurement to explore cultural factors and explain problematic assumptions and educational practices. When a qualitative research approach fits well with purpose and research question, findings can add to

the knowledge base and, pertinent to Tannenbaum's assertion, breathe new life into a particular area of scholarship, such as the underrepresentation of CLD students.

Because attitudes are subjective and may be painted with a broad brush, language is a point of access to complex core issues related to cultural diversity. Exploring the language of decision-makers in school programs and the language of CLD populations as they consider "giftedness" is one approach to gaining more than superficial understanding of how program creators and consumers think. One advantage of inductive, open-ended qualitative approaches, in contrast to quantitative approaches focused on confirming or challenging existing theories (see Corbin & Strauss, 2007), is that they move inquiry into unexplored territory, examining "what people do, know, think, and feel...[to help] develop, improve programs, and contribute to social change" (Patton, 2015, p. 170). Such exploratory studies can generate new directions in scholarship. Postpositivistic approaches are sensitive to context (p. 362), acknowledging "multiple realities constructed by groups of people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (p. 121).

However, postpositivistic studies of high-ability children and teens continue to be uncommon, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Gibson & Sauder, 2021; Goings & Ford, 2018; Kettler et al., 2017; Matthews et al., 2014; Michael-Chadwell, 2010; Ritchotte & Graefe, 2017; and Swanson, 2016). Ethnicity, demographics, life experiences, and associated societal issues garner little attention in studies of gifted-education programming (Henfield et al., 2017). In teacher preparation, the same gaps occur, a possible effect of which was evident in a still-rare postpositivistic exploration of subtle teacher bias (Spindler & Spindler, 1990) using extensive video-recorded classroom observation. A respected teacher volunteer was shocked by his pattern of selective interaction, which was "as consistently in the direction of positive appraisals for upper status and mainstream children . . . [as he was] negative in his appraisal of relationships for nonmainstream [children]" (p. 65):

[He] did not interact in the same way or with the same intensity with children who did not match his own cultural experience and background. This process of selecting out certain children and certain behaviors for approval and reinforcement, and ignoring others, is potentially as damaging as the exercise of overt prejudice and hostility towards certain children. (p. 68)

The two studies to be highlighted here are described as seminal because findings in both provided impetus for further exploration and development in scholarship. The studies were creative and original, two other aspects of *seminal* scholarship.

## Purpose

The multiple purposes of this article are related to raising awareness of the impact of cultural values on the selection of high-ability students for programs. Details about research methods in two studies conducted 30 years ago offer guidance for exploring the connection.

### Purpose 1: Connect Present with Past

The main purpose is to connect current concerns and understandings about underrepresentation with findings in a pair of seminal qualitative studies from the late 1990s (Peterson & Margolin, 1997; Peterson, 1999). Those studies followed admonitions of Borland (1993) and Tannenbaum (1990) in using a postpositivistic approach and focusing on sociological contexts, interactions, and assumptions.

Findings illuminated aspects of the referral process in which the cultural values of student nominees and teacher nominators might affect the identification of bright students missed during screening of standardized test scores—when those scores are involved in identifying students with high ability.

### Purpose 2: Raise Awareness of Cultural Values

A second purpose is to use the findings to raise awareness of cultural values (i.e., what a culture values, what is considered important, not how it is stereotyped and categorized), which may affect classroom interaction, teacher-student relationships, selection processes, and program philosophy and policies. Educators and scholars may discuss these affected areas with little or no attention to cultural *values*—for example, dominant-culture and minority-culture values, the effect of those values on how students experience school and learning, and even the values, protocols, and norms of the “teacher culture” when they refer students for a special program.

Atkinson (2004) argued that culture “consists of values and behaviors that are learned and transmitted within an identifiable community” (p. 10). Lefley’s (2002) definition of *culture* included a shared language (p. 4). Here, *dominant in dominant culture* refers to institutional and political power and influence, regardless of actual demographics. The first study made visible what is typically invisible in the subjective value-driven judgments during selection processes.

### Purpose 3: Raise Awareness of the Impact of Values on Identification

The third purpose is to raise awareness of how cultural values might affect identification of high-ability students. Relying on teacher referrals during the first or second stage of the identification process has been associated with underidentifying bright children of

color (McBee, et al., 2020). Cultural values (i.e., not as categorical descriptors of cultures) are typically not part of the scholarly literature and of official statements about gifted education (e.g., <https://www.nagc.org/about-nagc/nagc-position-statements-framing-papers>).

### Purpose 4: Draw Attention to the Research Approach

The final purpose is to draw attention to the research approach used. The strategies for recruitment for the first study included assuring school administrators that no teacher would miss a class, that the interview question would be open-ended (i.e., with no implicit theory-based direction), that the teachers and administrators would be invited to a presentation of findings, and that administrators would receive a summary report. As a result, probably, teachers engaged in lively interaction and administrators provided thorough logistical support. Participants in both studies spoke confidently. In the second study, many CLD participants expressed appreciation for being asked for their opinions.

## A Study of Teachers’ Nominating Language

### Research Question

The research question that guided the first study (Peterson & Margolin, 1997) was not *whether* and *how much* CLD students were underrepresented in programs for high-ability students. Answers to those questions had already been well documented (e.g., *National Excellence*, 1993). Instead, the question was *how* underrepresentation occurs invisibly and unquestioned in discussions about eligibility. Qualitative research methods were appropriate because the focus was on the teacher’s thinking as they orally made sense of “giftedness.”

### Research Approach

Generating *natural, everyday* talk, not limited to superficial, perfunctory, intentionally politically correct comments, was the goal when studying how teachers conceptualized “giftedness” during the referral process. Data-gathering strategies appropriate for qualitative, naturalistic research (e.g., discovery-oriented; minimal manipulation; open-ended; not focused on verification and confirmation; Patton, 2015) were as follows: 1) Teachers would respond to a question a program coordinator might ask them if attempting to locate bright students whose data had not been forwarded for further evaluation; 2) Teachers would be asked only one question, open-ended, with an added request for justification; 3) Only minimal interaction between

researcher and interviewees would occur, but the latter might interact spontaneously with colleagues if a small group of participants gathered. Language was the focus. Assumedly, the more multi-layered and complex, the richer the data.

Research method matters when studying the underrepresentation of CLD students in programs. Perhaps methods in recent decades are at least somewhat responsible for the relative lack of movement forward in understanding and addressing underrepresentation—that is, not bold enough to access and explore uncomfortable core issues (see Tannenbaum, 1990) and not able to generate complex data. Therefore, here, direct quotations provoke thought about genuinely exploratory qualitative approaches and the importance of the research question. When exploring CLD underrepresentation in programs, researchers must have access to decision-makers' thinking through language—ideally, in real time. Even one well considered, open-ended interview question may generate extensive data about thinking processes (Peterson, 2019).

## Context

A workshop participant reported that district leaders had tried, unsuccessfully, to match percentages of program participants with local demographics. Approximately 16% of the school population was culturally and linguistically diverse, with Latinx the largest CLD group. Many had come initially to harvest vegetables, but stayed, currently described respectfully as "settled out"—that is, no longer migrating.

Various equity initiatives had changed some teacher practices, but not the CLD percentages of gifted-program participants. For example, to address cultural disparities in behavioral referrals, principals had advised teachers not to mention culture or economic status on disciplinary reports. To address underrepresentation of CLD students in the National Honor Society, extra-curricular activities could be counted as community service. However, parents' late work shifts, dependence on their children for childcare, and limited public transportation precluded after-school activities for some students, and, for others, volunteering in the community. The leaders wondered if other strategies might better address underrepresentation.

## Gathering Data

The district gifted-education coordinator facilitated access to teachers in two middle schools, one downtown and the other suburban, for interviews during their allotted class-preparation time. Over the next three weeks, 55 teachers, all White / European American, volunteered to discuss the term *gifted*. At that time, no word other than *gifted* was used to refer to high-ability students in community schools, and *gifted program* referred

to curricula for those students. These terms therefore appear in this article when referring to the two studies of interest. The interview information and prompt were as follows:

Which students would you nominate for a gifted program—regardless of whether they are already eligible and/or are involved in such a program? I also invite you to explain your reasons for each nomination. I will record the interview for a research study and will record the nominees' names in my notes so that, after the interviews are completed, your director can organize two weekly groups of the most-nominated students to discuss topics related to growing up. An adult connected with the gifted program will lead those groups.

The teachers, regardless of coming alone, meeting as a grade-level team, or joining teacher peers as a small group, usually stayed for the entire class period, allowing them time to elaborate.

Even when a grade-level team participated together, with everyone on the team acquainted with the students being nominated, the teachers almost never challenged someone else's nomination or rationale. In addition, no one asked, "By whose definition?" Yet during later analysis, their language could be organized into 42 differing "definitions" of *giftedness*, among them a strong work ethic, motivation to achieve, eagerness to learn, goal orientation, "standing out," a positive relationship with teachers, a strong knowledge base, eager display of knowledge and talents, high academic performance, and winning competitive awards. Some teachers gave only one of these as justification, but most gave multiple justifications. In general, the teachers appeared to have constructed a personal understanding of giftedness and referred students based on their subjective view of the construct (see Hammerschmidt, 2016). Their deferential communication with each other was noteworthy, perhaps reflecting their shared experiences as colleagues, a respect for the autonomy inherent in separated classrooms, and the behavior norms of their middle-school teacher culture.

## Themes

The central phenomenon was that dominant-culture classroom teachers confidently nominated students as if the giftedness construct were universally understood and embraced. Their justifications reflected mainstream, dominant-culture values, according to anthropologists interested in the role of schools in the transmission of culture: individual, conspicuous, competitive achievement (Spindler & Spindler, 1990).

Frequency counts of words or phrases were not useful for determining themes (see Peterson, 2019) in the long, complex narrative responses to an open-ended question not based on pre-existing theory. Participants

sometimes mentioned a descriptor only once and for only one nominee, while others repeated it several times for one. Number of nominations per teacher also varied greatly. Noteworthy is that intelligence was rarely mentioned.

Here we will view these themes as values in the teacher culture (i.e., White, middle-income), as revealed in their language, with potential impact on the identification process. Some teachers distinguished between acceptable and immoderate levels of these behaviors: "thorough" versus "overconscientious"; "social" versus "shows off"; "sense of humor" versus "makes jokes"; "hard worker" versus "just works hard"; "shows talent" versus "center of attention"; "high self-esteem" versus "arrogant" or "puts herself down"; "quick" versus "hurries through assignments." These fine-line boundaries might be difficult for students and parents

to recognize regardless of culture, immigrant status, and acculturation. They also represent why word frequency was not adequate for determining themes.

Table 1 summarizes themes in the teachers' language and representative comments. Below, additional comments give context to the language in the table.

**Behavior.** Behavior was mentioned repeatedly and sometimes vehemently to justify either inclusion or exclusion. Based on tone and repetition per nominee, behavior was the most salient characteristic in the nomination process. Teachers sometimes added judgments about personality (e.g., "kind of a whiner," "abrasive"). Quiet was a frequent descriptor, mostly negative. Some teachers were indignant about students who "won't offer anything."

**Verbal Skills and Assertiveness.** Verbal strengths and skills were mentioned almost as often as behavior,

**Table 1:** Themes in Teacher Nominating Language

Theme	Representative Quotations
Behavior	<p>"I don't think she'd fit in a small group—kind of bossy."</p> <p>"Argues every side of everything . . . interrupts all the time."</p> <p>"Probably gifted, but he's a first-class jerk."</p> <p>"Steals time from the other kids."</p> <p>"Not motivated. I wouldn't put her into anything."</p> <p>"Just a little bit too quiet"; "Hard to tell what he can do."</p> <p>"Mouthy and belligerent"</p> <p>"Obnoxious and overbearing"</p> <p>"He's one of my favorite people."</p> <p>"He's a bright spot for me . . . one of my favorite people."</p>
Verbal Ability & Assertiveness	<p>"Has a great vocabulary and is able to use it."</p> <p>"Has a point of view"; "brings things up."</p> <p>"Uses big words."</p> <p>"A voracious reader, but doesn't do a lot of discussion"</p> <p>"She corrects me."</p>
Family Status	<p>"His parents are teachers."</p> <p>"Phenomenal parents"</p> <p>"A very bright family"</p> <p>"Insightful, but his background does interfere."</p> <p>"Dad is in upper management somewhere."</p> <p>"Both are well educated."</p> <p>"[Parents are] really involved in committee work."</p>
Work Ethic	<p>"He's gifted in that he's very conscientious."</p> <p>"They try hard."</p> <p>"Really puts in the time."</p>
Social Skills	<p>"Gifted—they'd have to be able to work with others—like in real life."</p> <p>"Awful social skills"</p> <p>"No leadership"</p>

but described less dramatically and with less varied language. Regarding how assertiveness plays a role when identifying ability, a teacher said, "The kids I'm recommending identified themselves. Their parents have done that, too."

**Family Status.** In the downtown school, almost no references to family status occurred. In the suburban school, they were common.

**Work Ethic.** With regard to work ethic, teachers' ambivalence was apparent in "has to work for her As" and "maybe she's just a kid who works hard." One teacher implied a limit: "wants to achieve so badly it's almost a detriment."

**Social Skills.** The social skills theme emerged from teachers' comments about sociability: "[Gifted kids] achieve in their classes, but also get along and are not a problem.

Themes in the teachers' language offer multi-layered evidence that they were often nominating students who affirmed them in their work as educators and contributed positively to the learning environment: eagerness to learn, conscientious effort, good behavior, social skills, classroom participation, verbal assertiveness, and a strong work ethic. These emergent themes arguably reflect values within the White middle-class teacher culture, with potential subjective impact on identification.

Pertinent to three theories mentioned at the outset of this article, the teachers' rationale for recommending students for special programming supports Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory that education does not transform society but reproduces it. The teachers nominated children who were similar to them in values. The teachers' rationale also supports Cicourel and Kitsuse's (1963) theory that the United States has, not a contest mobility, but a sponsorship mobility, with social class affecting how schools respond to students. The family-status theme supports Wilcox's (1982) theory of the culture of expectations, based on parents' achievements.

## The Second Study: Five Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Communities

### Purpose

The purpose of the second study was to explore various CLD cultural groups' perspectives about "giftedness" and examine their language themes separately, collectively, and, in general terms, vis á vis the teachers' language. The 100 participants were teachers, administrators, social workers, recent immigrants, parents, grandparents, and older-adolescent students in those cultural groups. Clients in family services were invited to participate because knowledge, awareness, and skills are needed for effective educator interaction with low-income families,

just as with persons who represent racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity (see Sue et al., 1992). After the director delivered the invitation, she was not involved.

### Research Question

The research question was the same as for the first study: How does underrepresentation occur, invisibly and unquestioned? In this study, however, participants would be from the populations underrepresented in programs for highly able students. Of interest was how they constructed giftedness and how their perspectives might affect teacher nominations.

### Research Approach

#### The Context

This second study (Peterson, 1999) occurred in five CLD communities in the midwestern state in which the study of teachers' language was conducted: Latinx, recent-immigrant Southeast Asian, Black, Native American, and low-income White. Recent-immigrant Southeast Asians were invited to participate because the effects of acculturation would assumedly be less than after many years of residency.

#### Recruitment

Participants in these communities, recruited with the help of administrators, counselors, or teachers or through snowball sampling, were invited to talk about the "most gifted" persons, of any age, they had known personally. They generally responded at length. School or program administrators created a schedule and a private area for the interviews.

#### Themes

The central phenomenon of this second study was that the CLD cultures viewed "giftedness" idiosyncratically. During qualitative analysis, emergent themes in the language of participants differed from community to community and, collectively, from the teachers' themes. These emergent themes reflected what they believed was important, what mattered, what guided their behaviors. Table 2 displays details about cultural group, size and pertinent diversity of community; number of participants; interview location, type, and duration; and major themes.

Table 3 contains examples of comments contributing to the main themes. The comments provide cultural context and demonstrate that responses were usually specific, not vague.

#### Themes Emerging in Two or More CLD Communities

Themes emerging in more than one of the culturally diverse communities in the second highlighted study might help to explain the underrepresentation of CLD

**Table 2:** Community size, Interview Types, Locations and Duration, and Themes

Cultural Group Community Size; Interviewees	Interview Location	Immersion Duration	Interview Type, Duration	Ranked Themes: What is Viewed as "Gifted"
<b>Latinx</b> Pop. 23,000 13% Latinx N = 12 (adults; 2 teens)	Community Cultural Center	3 weeks in the community	Individual interviews; 1 hour each	Art—as expression, not as performance; Humility; Service, Helping extended family
<b>Black</b> Pop. 300,000 2 Magnet Schools 54% & 38% Black N = 22 (adults)	2 schools, K-2, 3-4; Parent center; conference room; principal's office	6 weeks in the community	30-120 minutes per individual or pair	Selfless contribution to the neighborhood; Handiwork; Concern for family; Wisdom
<b>Native American</b> Pop. 650 100% Native N = 15 (adults)	Tribal center (tribal leaders); K-8 school (native language teachers)	2 days observing and interviewing	2 individuals, 2 groups: Tribal leaders, Native language teachers	Fluent in native language; Satisfaction in both cultures; Group/team emphasis, not individual; Contributes to the tribe; Talent: music, art, dance; Knowledge of culture
<b>Immigrant Asian</b> (in US < 5 yrs) in White town Pop. 2900 N = 12 (adults)	Church involved with resettlement	1 extended meeting	3 hours; Adults, with teen translator available	Education; Adaptability; Asceticism; Hard work; Focus on children; Attention to tradition; Respect for elderly; Respect for the past
<b>Low-income White</b> Pop. 6000 43% low-income; 18% poverty N = 39 (adults, teens)	Dept of Human Services (DHS); High school home economics classes	2 one-day visits to DHS and 1 day in high school	2 two-hour group interviews, —DHS; teens wrote responses in a class	Helping others; Child rearing; Handiwork; Manual dexterity; Artistic talent; Ability to overcome adversity; Social skills; Nonbook knowledge

students in programs for high-ability children and teens. Perhaps the reflected values were once common across all cultures, viewed positively and helping individuals and cultures to survive. Most of those values now contrast those of the dominant U.S. culture, according to findings in the study of teachers (i.e., individual, competitive, conspicuous achievement, Spindler & Spindler, 1990), potentially affecting educators' gatekeeping for special programs. The CLD communities' values are probably thought-provoking for any population, including White, middle-class teachers. The following were themes in the language of at least 2 CLD communities about giftedness:

- Helping others, listening, service to the community
- Manual dexterity, artistic ability
- Non-bookish learning, wisdom
- Concern for family, children, elderly
- Social ability, leadership
- Overcoming adversity
- Not "showing what you know"

### Based on the Themes and Relevant Literature, Who Might be Missed?

The five main themes in the teacher nomination language suggest that gatekeepers ignore bright students who are not consistently high achievers or who are quiet during classroom discussion. According to the themes in the second study, some highly capable students are not inclined to "demonstrate giftedness" enough to be referred for further evaluation. The following literature underscores that little-discussed, nuanced cultural differences can interfere with bright students' being identified as having high ability.

- An immigrant's low English proficiency and lack of familiarity in the host culture might contribute to shyness in the classroom, precluding verbal assertiveness (Castellano, 2003), which the teachers believed to be essential to giftedness.

**Table 3:** Themes in the Language of Residents of Five Culturally Diverse Communities

Theme	Representative Language
Art as expression, not performance	(Latinx) "She expresses herself in drawing. If she's sad, it gets her to feel better."
Humility	(Latinx) "You shouldn't put yourself above anyone else . . . If we succeed, good, but don't get a big head." (Black) "Kids in the neighborhood . . . [She] will do their hair and just make them feel good."
Selfless contribution	(Black) "He helps the school get their money for tutoring the children." (Low-income White) "He was the one people turned to."
Handiwork, manual dexterity	(Black) "Can . . . build a deck and doesn't need instructions . . . gifted with his hands." (Low-income White) "Calm hands, like a surgeon"; "Makes beautiful things"
Concern for family	(Black) "Stepped in for the mother. That's an aunt he'll always remember." (Black) "the tutelage he gave his family"
Child-rearing, teaching	(Low-income White) "Tells them the right thing."
Wisdom, non-bookish knowledge	(Black) "his desire to educate himself . . . about so many subjects and without a great deal of formal education"
Adaptation	(Immigrant Southeast Asian) "When he came, he had just his hands . . . he saved some money and rented a room and opened with two to three tables for a restaurant. He cooking everything good. Four or five years so successful he bought it."
Asceticism	(Immigrant Asian). "He ate only one time a day. He cut trees for the wood and he sells it and kills squirrels and snakes and sold it at the market . . . eats only what he gets and only buys rice . . . went to the temple to become a monk. I admire it because he needs so little."
(Native) No nominations, but they responded to "What might you notice?"	(Native American) "We're taught not to put ourselves above others." "The culture does not value bragging." (Native American) "Obviously there are people who have come to the forefront, doing good for people, providing leadership. They do it quietly"
No comments about advanced academics or individual achievement.	(Native American) "The idea of giftedness is . . . seen as assessment, something not promoted in the culture." (Native American) "can blend the cultures, can find satisfaction in both, without becoming assimilated" (Native American) "take an active role in monitoring the changes in the tribe so the culture stays intact."

- Low English proficiency can limit immigrants' and other CLD children's ability to express sophisticated concepts, leading to low appraisals of their intelligence (Maker & Schiever, 1989). To develop that skill level requires 4-6 years (Ritchotte et al., 2020).
- Ironically, monolingual teachers might judge the rudimentary English skills of immigrant children negatively, missing the remarkable abilities inherent in bi- and multilingualism and coping in a new society (Bernal, 1989).
- U.S. and international students from collectivist cultures, in which interdependence and shared resources are needed for survival, might expect to work collaboratively with peers in the classroom and have readily available adult help. Teachers from individualistic cultures who

are not sensitive to those expectations might then miss opportunities to offer support, including when recommending bright students for opportunities. Viewing independence as reflecting giftedness might seem strange to low-income families, who tend to be collectivist, even when highly acculturated (Liu & Waller, 2018).

- Acculturation, the process of adapting and changing as a result of living in a new culture (Berry, 2005), likely affects classroom interaction. Torres et al. (2012) found that Anglo-oriented behavior was associated with integration and lower levels of acculturative stress. Yet feeling pressure to disassociate from perceived cultural, linguistic, and personal disadvantages in order to demonstrate giftedness and "reach potential" might leave CLD students feeling socially, academically and culturally adrift.

- In the Native American settlement, after the White and Native teachers had heard a summary of findings, a long-tenure White teacher privately explained her theory about why veteran teachers did not nominate students and newer teachers did. She believed the teachers with several years at the BIE school, most of them from large families, low-income status, and small towns, had become acculturated into the Native culture, which does not encourage "standing out." The newer teachers, urban in background and from small families, behaved according to dominant-culture values. If they stayed, she believed they would become attuned to Native values, unlikely to nominate. Her informal theory pertains to the study of teachers' language because acculturation likely affects being viewed as "gifted," as well as fitting programs built around dominant-culture values. After data-gathering in the Latinx community, the program leader noted that all cultural-minority nominees were well assimilated into the dominant White culture.
- Cultural styles of conversation can affect how educators assess the ability of CLD students (Goodwin, 1990). For example, teachers might view Black English vernacular to as inferior to standard English instead of a recognized form of English (Ford, 2011).
- Students with difficult home contexts might be unable to focus, negatively affecting academic performance. They may have no space at home for homework and may not be comfortable or self-assured enough to interact in classroom discussions. Behavior at school can also reflect hunger; fatigue when too many people live in a small house with too few beds; anxiety and depression because of ostracism at home or at school; and self-medication with alcohol or other drugs (see Peterson, 1997).
- Unpredictability at home (Liu & Waller, 2018), including seeing friends and family harmed, can lead to impulsivity, and being disinclined to delay gratification to focus on academic work (Burke et al., 2010).

In summary, bright students' life circumstances can affect whether teachers advocate for them. Circumstances and deference to authority might also inhibit CLD parents from requesting evaluation of their children for possible placement (Scott et al., 1992). Immigrant families often have high educational aspirations but may not yet be comfortable in school or community (Liu & Waller, 2018). Latinx adults' valuing social competence when defining intelligence is an example of a CLD community value contrasting dominant-culture teachers' emphasis on cognitive intelligence (Barbarin et al., 2010). When teachers are aware of values, they can respectfully, non-patronizingly, and unobtrusively validate these values in CLD students.

## Selected Perspectives Related to Emergent Themes in the Two Studies

The two studies of interest here were initially published in a format typical of postpositivistic studies, with sensitizing literature at the outset and additional literature that became pertinent during data analysis presented later. It is appropriate here to consider the latter when examining the findings in both studies nearly 30 years after data collection. The study of teacher language exposed values-based biases that might close the gate to participation for CLD students and also affect curriculum, basic policy, and school-parent and teacher-student relationships. While there has been progress, educational gaps still exist, with personal and social costs (Worrell, 2014; Vasquez, 2012). The following section connects the 1997 and 1999 findings to current pedagogical concepts and theories, which acknowledge that the underrepresentation of CLD students in programs for high-ability students persists.

## Multicultural Relationships in Schools

### The Teacher-Student Relationship

When the teachers in the first of the two highlighted studies nominated students, their language exposed both positive and negative biases toward bright students. Behavior was the main theme. Language about behavior and personality was rich with subjective negative judgment. Sosniak and Gabelko (2008) noted that teacher efficacy, especially the ability to engage low-income students in learning, is crucial for responding to students' concerns.

**Differential Selection.** Hammond (2014) noted that school can be a hostile environment for students of color, with an entrenched "pedagogy of compliance" even in schools with considerable cultural diversity. Disciplinary disparity (Skiba & Rausch, 2006) in response to noncompliant behavior reflects teacher biases about behavior. Students who act out in classrooms tend to perceive that teachers are uncaring and have low achievement expectations (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). According to the differential selection hypothesis (Gregory & Thompson, 2010; Piquero, 2008), teachers differentially punish ethnic and racial minority youth for infractions based on subjective (e.g., challenges to teachers' authority), rather than objective (e.g., physical fights, possessing a weapon) (Gregory & Weinstein) criteria because of racial bias, cultural mismatch, and behavioral stereotypes (Gregory & Thompson). When dealing with problematic behavior, administrators might help teachers view it as reflecting the student-teacher relationship (Pane, 2010) and approach it accordingly, with a school counselor as mediator.

**Cultural Mismatch.** The findings in the two studies of cultural values argue that underrepresentation of CLD students in programs for high-ability children and teens is due to mismatched cultural values. The cultural mismatch hypothesis (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008) suggests that behavior considered “normal” by students may be perceived as defiant by teachers. In the first study, behaviors teachers deemed essential for identification as “gifted” (e.g., verbal assertiveness, demonstrations of giftedness) did not fit some CLD cultures’ valuing of humility and *not* displaying knowledge and talents. The contrasting CLD and teacher themes can be incorporated into professional development, building bridges of communication, and acknowledging and accessing students’ funds of knowledge.

Changes in research foci and classroom teaching since data were gathered for the two seminal studies reflect movement away from unidirectional assimilation into White, middle-class cultural values and toward validating and overtly supporting the values of other cultural groups. The following perspectives reflect the wisdom of making school systems, curricula, policies, and practices relevant and responsive enough to CLD cultures to nurture and sustain them.

### Funds of Knowledge

In the study in which teachers’ referral language reflected their cultural values (Peterson & Margolin, 1997), even their rationale and brief discussions about nominated students generally did not note strengths beyond those associated with academic performance. Home context was usually ignored if it was not obviously connected to high performance, such as enrichment through travel and overt, supportive parental involvement at school. The teachers identified high ability mostly based on classroom performance.

The “funds of knowledge” concept is associated with a project involving households in the U.S.-Mexico border region (Moll et al., 1992). The phrase refers to the complex understandings children from working-class families bring to school—for example, of strenuous physical labor, economic uncertainty, and social networking for resources necessary for survival. Teachers who recognize clear contrasts between classroom and households can employ qualitative methods as field researchers to study households to gain a deeper, more holistic, more sophisticated understanding of students. These methods can also help them gain access to funds of knowledge that can help to make classroom experiences more relevant and counter the notion that working-class families are “deficient.” Subsequently the teachers can contribute to discussions with colleagues when identification and curricular decisions are the focus, helping them think beyond broad categories and stereotypes of diverse cultures and affirming Mexican

Americans’ strong valuing of respect of others, pride, family, education, and cultural identity, for example.

Teachers can collaborate with colleagues on this field research (Darling-Hammond, 2006), taking advantage of their access to households because of parents’ concerns about their children’s education. Teachers can use questionnaires to gain direction for classroom activities, recruit volunteers to assist in the classroom, and become more self-aware of their own and the families’ fears, assumptions, uncertainty, and misunderstandings. With each teacher interviewing and observing a few families at the outset of each school year, a large number of families can become more connected and engaged through this bidirectional learning. Even one brief skills-oriented professional-development event, led by a school counselor, can help teachers form open-ended questions, respect privacy, and probe gently (see Peterson, 2020). Less formal and more bidirectional learning and support through after-school sessions can remind teachers that the classroom is only one space in the complex life of a student.

Increasing teachers’ awareness of students’ home and community through direct engagement, as well as raising their awareness of talents and interests not evident at school, might lead to more fair assessment of students’ abilities. Greater awareness of students’ funds of knowledge and understandings can also generate teachers’ and students’ interest in economic, educational, recreational and health systems, domestic and world geography, history, forms of government, national leaders, international relationships, and impact of political decisions—all of these being possible options for curriculum units and projects (see Moll et al., 1992).

### Evolving Pedagogy

**Culturally responsive pedagogy.** Hammond (2014) referred to learning partnerships that can become relational communities of learners—that is, with *culturally responsive pedagogy*. Teachers can increase their dexterity and adaptability as they give feedback, increase their awareness of students’ contexts, stay alert and responsive to students’ social and emotional challenges, help students build cognitive strengths through productive struggle, and access the funds of knowledge and experience students bring to the conversations. Ford and Scott (2016) described culturally responsive education as valuing cultural differences, using a multicultural curriculum that incorporates culturally diverse ways of learning, and using culturally and linguistically relevant testing and evaluation. Ritchotte et al. (2020) described such culturally responsive pedagogy in practical terms, helping teachers see, understand, teach, challenge, and advocate for underserved learners with high ability. Strategies involving collaboration are fundamental to the emphasis on engagement.

The teachers described earlier in this article did not communicate a posture of learning *from* their students (see Ladson-Billings, 2014), and creating differentiated curricula to address needs. What they spoke about when arguing for further evaluation of eligibility was often knowledge based—measured through standardized tests and classroom academic performance. Overt reference to cultural beliefs and behaviors was essentially absent. During the nominations, the teachers did not refer to qualities reflected in the language themes of the CLD communities.

**Culturally relevant pedagogy.** Another example of evolving pedagogy and the importance of theory in increasing the rigor and power of educational research is culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014). This pedagogy reflects a consciousness that students of color have been shortchanged and espouses approaches that can engage the least-advantaged students through art, poetry, and dance, for example, to establish a foundation for current and future learning relationships. This evolving pedagogy embraces the notion that both scholarship and culture are fluid, not static. Literature about what makes success possible for advantaged middle-class students typically does not discuss inherent social and economic factors that contributed. Nor are teachers likely to encourage critical consideration of policies and practices reflecting power structures within the dominant culture, which potentially affect dropout rates, suspension, expulsion, academic failure, and disengagement across school populations.

In the study of CLD communities (Peterson, 1999), no Native or veteran-teacher interviewee in the Native American settlement recommended a student for a program for bright students. The Native culture does not value “putting yourself above others.” However, when asked a related question, a tribal leader remarked that someone held in high respect would need to be able to speak the native language and be comfortable in both cultures. This leader testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs (Lasley, 2011) about the importance of rooting education in cultural values and the traditional language because the latter is the link to spirituality, religion, and the Earth—the “language our souls know.” In his testimony, he poignantly underscored the impact of the loss of culture, including being forced to abandon their language during the boarding school era. He emphasized how thoroughly the culture permeates everyday life—food, clothing, homemaking, kinship system, and responsibility to family. However, he noted that the percentage of settlement residents fluent in the tribal language was dwindling, limited more and more to older adults. The increasing challenge of locating speakers of the language to be “culture teachers” in the school was due to the shrinking pool of fluent speakers. His detailed written and oral testimony is a

reminder that *culturally sustaining pedagogy* has increasing relevance—not just for the Native American settlement, but also for immigrant populations, when the familiar culture is at risk of being lost to them.

**Culturally sustaining pedagogy.** Instead of viewing differences in cultural values in terms of right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, values other than those of the dominant culture can be framed as strengths to appreciate, respect, and utilize in good-fit programming. Values are inherent in a culture, revealed through language with qualitative research methods. Of the culture-oriented pedagogies discussed above, culturally sustaining pedagogy is especially relevant to the two studies of cultural values for which data were gathered nearly three decades ago (i.e., 1994). With this pedagogy, the focus is not on dominant-culture achievement and measurement mindsets—that is, a process of “unidirectional assimilation into whiteness” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 3) and nominating students for programs for high-ability students accordingly. Instead, considering the oft-referenced deficit-thinking phenomenon, the emphasis is on protecting and maintaining CLD communities’ linguistic, literate, and cultural practices as strengths, resources and assets, not on overcoming deficiencies, with the posture of owing “no explanations to White people about the value of our children’s culture, language, and learning potential” (p. 3)

**English language learners.** Some of the challenges of maintaining connection to the heritage culture, if not actually preserving it, are familiar to dual-language children and their families. The concern of the Native community was preserving, reclaiming, revitalizing and restoring language to ensure the tribe’s identity and survival. Inferred was that language is the key element, now in danger of disappearing. In the Senate testimony were requests for government assistance in preserving it.

Monolingual educators might not understand that thought processes cannot be fully expressed in a language other than the heritage language because “language meanings and implications cannot be simply translated. ...When translations occur, critical knowledge and meaning become lost or lessened. ...These interruptions in the continuum of language, ...culture, spirituality, religion, and understandings cause disruptions in social wellbeing” (Lasley, 2011, page unavailable). Educators who understand these translation concerns will be alert to them in dual-language learners, recognizing students’ frustration and sadness over not being able to communicate meaning precisely—if indeed they attempt to do that. According to dual-language expert Espinosa (2014), early schooling and curricula should be intentionally bicultural and bilingual, with bilingual charts, schedules, directions, labels, cognate charts, word walls, language scaffolding, listening centers, songs, photos, manipulatives, anchor texts, partnerships

with parents, bilingual adult volunteers, and a small-group format for practicing dialogue—always honoring the home language and not implying that it deserves less respect than English. Teachers can modify instruction based on what they observe in language development. They can use portfolios to assess student progress and use multiple assessors in multiple contexts. Authentic assessment can happen during ongoing classroom activities. Espinosa emphasized that the goal for all children is to be bilingual, and that knowing more than one language is a gift, not a detriment. Being immersed in two or more languages does not confuse a child.

Early childhood education (ECE) gives children from low-income families and ELLs a chance for equal footing with those from middle-and upper socioeconomic levels in kindergarten. Children who receive instruction in their native language have higher rates of academic achievement (Burchinal & Cryer, 2003), a key factor in being nominated for further evaluation for program eligibility. However, ECE is often not available to children with economic disadvantages. To shrink educational disparities, the heritage language is especially important during the early school years. Children are attempting to master the curriculum while simultaneously gaining competence in the language of instruction (Goldenberg, 2008).

### Applying CLD Values to Teaching and Learning

**Cooperative, Collaborative, and Communal Learning.** Culturally relevant strategies for making learning meaningful and comfortable are part of the literature about underrepresentation. Reflecting the recurring CLD communities' themes of non-bookish learning and helping others in the two highlighted studies, meta-analytic research has shown that collaborative learning affects achievement outcomes more positively for Black and Latino than for White students (Rohrbeck, et al., 2003). With group-oriented communalism (Hurley, et al., 2009), Black students do better than their White counterparts and less well when interpersonal competition is emphasized. In general, cooperative learning increases academic achievement (Slavin, 2011).

**A cross-cultural career component.** A classroom unit or weekly age-appropriate career exploration at all K-12 grade levels, reflecting cooperative, collaborative, and communal learning not focused on a particular domain, can result in meaningful cross-cultural interaction. It can vary in duration, raise awareness of future options, guide self-reflection, and promote identity development (Peterson, 2020). Even young bright children with economic advantages can worry precociously about not knowing "how to do a job," and "how to go to college." Invested adults may erroneously trust that someone else is providing career guidance—or that it is not essential for bright students. Unfortunately, such thinking can leave

bright children across all socioeconomic levels and cultural backgrounds without career guidance (Hébert & Kelly, 2006).

For students who lack models for higher education and whose access to summer and other enrichment programs is limited by finances (see Aud et al., 2010; Sosniak & Gabelko, 2008), as well as for those with economic advantages and readily available models, a program director might organize small-group field trips, using a school van. Local engineering firms, design studios, research laboratories, or manufacturing firms are possible destinations. Onsite interviews or panel discussions might be possible. Inviting entrepreneurs to speak to interested students at school about personal fit in careers can prod bright students to consider what contributes to life satisfaction. At school, guest panels of local adults who successfully changed careers can lessen the anxiety of bright students who mistakenly believe career direction must be firm even before middle school and never change. Students may be interested in several careers, are probably unfamiliar with most career options, and may worry that a decision about university major will leave a strong interest behind forever (Peterson & Peters, 2021).

A curriculum focused on social, emotional, and career development can generate cross-cultural connections, expressive-language skills, and social information (Peterson, 2020). Small-group discussion about strengths and limitations, influencers, and aspirations can foster career development during the school years (Peterson et al., 2009).

However, bright students may miss out on career guidance because advanced academic classes typically do not discuss the fit of personality, personal values, and interests (i.e., not just test scores and academic performance) in a career. The program coordinator and a school counselor, whose accredited training reflects national career-development standards, might collaboratively organize a career curriculum. They can proctor and discuss interest inventories and guide Internet searches of careers, employment trends, and educational requirements. A one-time individual career-shadowing experience is an additional component that can immerse both ELLs and English speakers in the practical language of career planning and development, countering the relative dearth of media portrayals of engineering and other STEM careers, for example.

**Making the dominant culture strange.** In the first study, nominations reflecting dominant culture values were not challenged. One strategy to address that status quo (e.g., asking "What in the U.S. White culture might seem strange to persons in other U.S. cultures?") can be useful during professional development events, helping teachers hold the dominant culture at arm's length, think *non*hierarchically about cultural values, and move away from thinking that U.S. dominant-culture values

should be the standard to which other cultures' values are compared. Bright adolescents can respond to that same question. In the study of CLD communities, the following sample responses to the "strangeness" question are instructive about cultural values and differences.

- Latinx adults were puzzled about what "education" includes (e.g., extra-curricular activities). A parent said, "We need to educate the parents to know that it is important for their children to be involved at school and how they should behave so that they'll be recognized."
- Native Americans mentioned funerals: "It seemed very cold to me, the way they treat the deceased."
- A tribal leader said, "They only know the White view. They have never had to think of another view . . . to sort that out. They'll start to get conflicting messages. Whites don't like that." Another settlement resident said, "[They aren't] interested in learning about us."
- Two in the recent-immigrant Asian group had noticed "people living by themselves on farms without other people around" and "families not taking care of old people."
- Two Black women, state employees, were bothered by their White colleagues' preoccupation with appearance and materialism and lack of commitment to "people helping people."

### Linking Past and Present

Would Tannenbaum (1990) make the assertion now that he made more than three decades ago about biting to the core of underrepresentation? Subjectivity, not faulty measurement, is likely part of this core. Teachers are de facto gatekeepers when program leaders want to know who might have been missed during screening of test scores early in the identification process. Their cultural values have impact at this stage—and earlier as well, because they affect the learning process. Teacher values may conflict with a student's values. Classroom reticence because cultural values do not encourage "showing what you know" and "standing out" precludes verbal assertiveness and other displays of eager learning, highly valued by teachers in the first study. CLD groups' valuing of wisdom, not knowledge, also fits poorly with the common emphasis on test performance during identification for special programs and in classroom academics (Peterson & Peters, 2021). In general, if bright CLD students have difficulty in predominantly White educational settings (Henfield et. al, 2017; Webb & Linn, 2016), they may miss opportunities to interact with intellectual peers in advanced classes, potentially affecting identity, social, emotional, and career development.

The differing themes in the teachers' referral language do not argue that the term *gifted* is inappropriate nor that appropriate programming is unnecessary. Instead, the

focus here has been on how cultures differ in what they hold in high regard, and what is instilled in children as desirable and valuable in behaviors and learning. Cultural differences in values can affect identification, programming, and retention.

Findings in the two studies reintroduced here underscore that the terms *giftedness*, *achievement*, *potential*, *accomplishment*, *success*, *rigor*, *leadership*, *dependability*, and *work ethic* are all culture-bound, assumedly understood and applied according to cultural values in specific contexts. For the sake of exploring how underrepresentation occurs, scholars might explore these and other constructs nonhierarchically for meanings in school, at home, and across cultural groups—with respect to how they are constructed, ad hoc. "In the eye of the beholder" applies to equity concerns because policies and practices conceived according to dominant-culture values drive what is available for bright students.

In education, *gifted* has been a useful general term, but the perspective that giftedness is synonymous with achievement or productivity, according to the first study, is being increasingly exposed as ignoring differences among cultures about what is and is not valued (Peterson, 1999) and ignoring differences in developmental tempo and personal circumstances that affect whether, how and which abilities are demonstrated (e.g., Desmet et al., 2020; Peterson, 2001, 2002). Whether the term *gifted* should be changed (Gentry, 2021) is not the focus here. If it were replaced with another word, freshly minted and seemingly without political overtones, underrepresentation might still persist. Achieving crisper measurement for the sake of less-fraught decision-making might actually make underrepresentation of CLD students an even larger issue due to an increased number of bright students not identified as eligible (Matthews & Peters, 2018). This article has addressed only a few pertinent elements: the impact of cultural values on processes and some developmental, educational, and sociological factors that may affect who participates and who does not.

The fit of cultural values and behaviors in programs warrants critical attention, as do the persistent charges of cultural elitism in spite of serious efforts to move toward more equitable policies, programs, and participation. How programs are structured and whether they continue to segregate students into de facto cultural groups and economic levels (Sapon-Shevin, 1994) reflect cultural values.

### Implications For Educators

If decision-makers respect the values reflected in the themes of the CLD communities when they are considering eligibility, they might rethink the notion of "fit" in program for bright students. When programs are designed to fit students' *needs* instead of students needing

to fit *programs* based on the dominant-culture values of competitive performance, eager display of knowledge, and assertive contributions to discussion, both dominant-culture and CLD students may experience a creative, holistic, differently constructed curriculum (Peterson, 2016), find common ground, and thrive among intellectual peers.

### Rethinking “Rigor”

Rigor, too, might be conceptualized differently—perhaps with emphasis on broad understanding of multiple areas instead of mastery in one or only a few. Students might then be more prepared socially and emotionally, not just intellectually, for higher education (see Peterson, 2000b). Broad-based preparation might make higher education intellectually exciting—and social and emotional health less precarious—during young-adult adjustments to university life. Creative, interactive, collaborative program components can benefit all bright students while generating cross-cultural connections naturally.

A common assumption about educating bright, complex children and teens in familiar academic domains is that only *more* material, delivered *rapidly* and with heavy homework, reflects *rigor*. However, the construct of rigor should be examined critically. While a more-and-faster curriculum makes sense through the individualistic, measurement-oriented achievement lens of the dominant culture, that approach can preclude attention to complex societal problem-solving; critical thinking; *unfamiliar* and avant-garde areas of study; exploration in the humanities; and social, emotional, and career development.

Awareness of differing cultural values can help decision-makers not only during identification (e.g., how high ability is conceptualized and demonstrated), but also in program planning (e.g., communication and cross-cultural relationships among all invested adults). Such awareness can also help when formulating program philosophy (e.g., a social and emotional component at all grade levels; a rigorous curriculum without preoccupation with competition; a goal of broad knowledge and awareness, not just acceleration; community volunteers utilized to augment current curriculum with short-term enrichment; and prioritizing critical thinking skills and complex, real-world problem-solving. In the study of CLD communities, some of them valued practical application of intelligence highly.

### Being Cautious with Assumptions

Not all bright, successful students are highly verbal (Peterson & Peters, 2021) and not all are eager readers and writers. ELLs may be verbally precocious, but only in their native language. Small-font print may dance on the page for someone with hypersensitive visual processing

(Grant, 2016). Long-term projects and heavy reading assignments may not be a good fit for bright students with deficits in attention and may contribute to anxiety and dread. High-anxiety perfectionism, driven by a fear of mistakes and failure (Greenspon, 2021), might be less prevalent with a more varied curriculum.

Some bright teens may not be able to take advantage of academic enrichment outside of school because, for example, the family depends on the students’ year-around employment (Aud et al., 2010). A varied, creative, and flexible curriculum can address enrichment gaps (Peterson, 2016), perhaps with volunteer lecturers from medical or other professional centers in the community engaging these students. Bright underachievers can interact in advanced classes with intellectual peers, perhaps with supports in and outside of class, learning in spite of low morale, anger, grief, isolation, and development-related challenges (Peterson, 2002, Peterson & Peters, 2021).

### Applying Past to Present

How might the contrasting emergent values in the language of teachers and CLD communities be applied to underrepresentation concerns currently? Educators can consider their interpersonal interaction with CLD students. Interacting respectfully with CLD students and their parents and guardians can not only can foster mutually engaging communication and learning, but can also generate cross-cultural programming that promotes cooperation and collaboration. Thinking about acculturation as a continuum can help to avoid assumptions about strengths and needs of immigrant students based on cultural stereotypes. Valuing differences can also help to develop a teacher posture of learning *from*, not just *about*, diverse cultures and employing culturally sustaining strategies that celebrate them. Johnson (2018) believed that European Americans’ acknowledging White privilege (i.e., advantages and entitlements not readily available to people of color) and the systems that maintain it is the first step toward addressing discrimination. Intentionally changing from advocating assimilation into White dominant-culture values, behaviors, and priorities to valuing and sustaining CLD ways of being are next steps. The culturally sustaining pedagogy is not new, but the concept of funds of knowledge and the renewed interest in respecting and appreciating diversity are evidence that CLD cultural values may increasingly be recognized as strengths, not deficits.

### Social and Emotional Learning

Instead of, or in addition to, advanced classes, preparation for the transition to higher education can attend to developmental tasks (e.g., identity, direction, relationships, autonomy) high-ability students typically struggle with after they leave familiar territory, relationships,

and social and academic identities behind (Peterson, 2000a, 2000b). Scholars have generally neglected these areas. Developing autonomy is the greatest challenge during the transition to higher education, according to a follow-up study of bright students (Peterson, 2000a).

Curriculum focused on social and emotional development can actually be central to a program, reaching *all* identified bright students and embracing cultural diversity, including ELLs (Peterson, 2016). Studies have shown that regular small-group discussion focused on social and emotional learning can bring intellectual peers from diverse cultural backgrounds together to forge meaningful, cross-cultural personal connections (Jen et al., 2017; Peterson, 2013; Peterson & Lorimer, 2011). They can give and receive feedback about complex thoughts, develop expressive language, and normalize doubt and anxiety. Shy students can gain social information and feel known by at least a small group of peers (Peterson et al., 2009).

Especially important, ELLs can expand language skills through listening and interacting. When bonding and mutual support occur, cultural barriers may diminish. Talking about shared developmental tasks contributes to a sense of commonality (Gladding, 2003). Talking about the asset-burden paradox of high capability (Peterson, 2012) can normalize the stress of high expectations from self and others and raise awareness of nuanced cultural differences and similarities. Especially when enough teachers are not available for advanced levels, or when space is limited, small-group discussion, including dividing a class into small groups with an assigned developmental topic (Peterson, 2020), can be an efficient, low-cost approach to addressing needs of bright students from varied cultural and economic backgrounds, including preparing them for higher education.

Aware that some cultures value reticence and deferential respect for authority, wise teachers do not insist that students demonstrate knowledge orally. Teachers use light conversation between classes and when supervising study periods to learn about and validate diverse students' nonacademic gifts and talents, including, for some, being impressively bilingual or multilingual.

### Embracing Complexity

Programs not preoccupied with measured performance (in contrast with cross-discipline learning, broadened

awareness, and shared insights) can intentionally and overtly embrace complexity—nonlinear creative thinkers, uncommon learning preferences, and cultural differences in behavior and verbal expression. Adjusting curriculum to include natural social interaction can especially support CLD students who otherwise do not feel comfortable in dominant-culture settings (Peterson, 2002).

## Conclusion

What is the "bitter core" Tannenbaum referred to? Is language at the core of underrepresentation—at least partly responsible? Does the referral language of the "teacher judges" (Foucault, 1977), which has been made "normal," epitomize unjust practices that continue because dominant-culture educators do not question their own and colleagues' biased referral and selection language? Do they not question it because professional development has not raised awareness of cultural values with respectful, non-pejorative, nonhierarchical language? Is their language in the study similar to their language when they discuss bright students in the teachers' workroom or the broader community? When they create and review policies and philosophy? Becoming self-conscious about word choice, tone, and bias might start to crack the granite of underrepresentation—not unlike the language shifts related to sexual harassment and race that began a few decades ago.

If power is invisible during selection, more studies exploring thinking, *through language*, are needed. More attention to sociological factors involving both educators and students and more anthropological perspectives in scholarship are warranted. Adding educator self-consciousness about language might lead to a shift regarding underrepresentation. The study of teacher language here made visible the power involved in deciding who should participate in programs. What is invisible cannot be controlled or changed easily. The study of language in the teacher and CLD communities revealed that cultural values are complex and rooted, affecting how education for high-ability students is conceptualized, created, delivered, and experienced. Addressing underrepresentation of CLD students in programs requires attention to all of these aspects.

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