

Begin with Equity in Mind

The 2020-2021 school year has caused K-12 and higher education officials to rethink practices supporting students, especially those from RCELD (racial, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and diverse) backgrounds whose communities and families have struggled extensively during the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of accountability and high stakes testing somewhat shifted to health and safety protocols, reopening schools properly, and preparing for student regression in curricular areas. However, the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others has caused many educators, leaders included, to think about how issues of racial injustice and diversity are addressed on campuses and in programs. Many gifted students have participated in marches, rallies, and campaigned across the US fighting to see systemic change. These same students have also advocated for equities on campuses as well. So how can educators start the new year with a culturally equitable mindset? Below, we share strategies educators (leaders included) can implement as they start the new school year supporting cultural responsiveness in school and gifted programs.

Build an On-Campus or Inter-district Equity & Diversity Committee/Team

For the new school year, a great way to promote a more equitable and culturally responsive gifted campus or program is to ensure there is a stakeholder group to support this journey. An equity and diversity committee should consist of individuals who are capable of setting goals for a campus or district program that builds capacity in educators and leaders to ensure equitable practices are occurring. Equity & diversity teams and committees believe all students can achieve academic excellence at high levels. They support district and campus goals through an equity lens and identify areas for improvement. These individuals consist of teachers, leaders, community members, parents, and even students. Equity committees focus on inclusive efforts for the campus/program, encourage conversations about social justice and equity, foster a positive campus environment that respects, celebrates, and embraces differences and moves to eliminate disparities that negatively affect student achievement.

Utilize Campus and Program Data to Support SMART Goals Centered on Equity

The previous year taught us many aspects about our programs and schools as a whole. What is important moving forward is the ability to use data (quantitative and qualitative) to support decision making and goal setting. Being data driven is at the heart of cultural responsiveness. Having an awareness

of the individualized needs of students whose cultural differences impact how they learn is critical for analyzing and using data to support them where they are. Addedly, recognizing and setting personalized, realistic goals for these students is paramount. A critical focus should be on SMART goal setting because this process creates a paradigm shift to improve the gifted program and overall school. SMART stands for *specific; measurable; attainable; relevant* (realistic and results-focused); and *timely* (Elias, 2014). SMART goals help frame achievement and equity outcomes for students. Implementation of SMART goals continuously improves your program and enforces adherence to a growth mindset for leaders, teachers, and staff. Ultimately, students become data driven and focused in their own learning.

Attend Professional Learning Opportunities Based in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

At the beginning of the year, educators usually attend professional learning related to their content and subject area. Leaders must consider including training focused on cultural competence, cultural responsiveness, and equity in school and district professional learning plans for the year. Ongoing professional learning in these topics can be an effective way for gifted educators to connect to pedagogy, increase and improve skill development, and remain abreast of current research and best practices. Professional learning in culturally responsive pedagogy also has the potential to reduce gaps in gifted teacher knowledge on nominating, identifying, and serving various student populations.

Align Curriculum & Instruction to Support Inclusivity of All Student Populations in Gifted

Incorporating the everyday lived experiences and cultures of *all* students within curricular & instructional practices has the capability of improving the learning environment for everyone. If gifted educators ensure daily practices which mirror their students & their needs, the relevant connections will be invaluable to them. Ladson-Billings (1995) shared with us that pedagogy prioritizing students' lived experiences provides the foundation for good teaching. Pedagogy also includes curriculum. An inclusive gifted curriculum is not prescribed, nor does it resemble, "traditional" teaching contexts. It acknowledges all cultures, beliefs, and values equitably without solely focusing on Western historical contexts. District and school leaders must insist on an equity-based approach to incorporating diversity in curriculum and instruction where teachers are sup-

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tal area of the garden, the space that each plant takes, the fractions of the garden designated for each type of plant, a total budget, and fencing.

The Garden Project is an example of how we ensure we assign worthwhile mathematical tasks that “call for problem formulation, problem solving, and mathematical reasoning” (NCTM, 1991, p. 25). Such tasks allow students to approach solutions in valid and alternate ways (NCTM, 2014), determine their merits (Siegler, 1989), and compare the validity of the various solutions (CCSSI, 2010).

Comparisons of different solution paths position students to communicate their reasoning to others (CCSSI, 2010; NCTM, 2014). The Garden Project has them present their approaches and mathematical thinking to their classmates throughout the task with gallery walks and whole-class presentations. Such communication includes student-to-student talk and provides students with the opportunities they need to witness other strategies and find an approach that they possess and use successfully. We utilize talk moves that call for us to facilitate discussions.

In addition to talk, we support our students’ communication through mathematical writing (Casa et al., 2016). The sense-making environment that nurtures the completion of worthwhile tasks and talk further supports students’ inclinations to jot down ideas in writing. We further compel students to inform others and present their arguments (see Firmender et al., 2017). Through the Garden Project, students

are asked to explain their mathematical thinking and approaches to their problems in writing to help their classmates better understand why they chose certain strategies and how they went about coming to a solution.

Such a communication-rich environment that asks students to reason and problem-solve has the potential to elicit mathematical creative ideas that are novel, convey fluency and flexibility, and are elaborate relative to what has been taught (Casa et al., 2016; Firmender et al., 2017). The Garden Project supported students’ creative approaches (NCTM, 2016). They had the option to attack the problem from a variety of viewpoints, such as from an irrigation, landscape architecture, or cost-efficient approaches. From there, students were asked to defend their choice and critique the reasoning of others.

Conclusion

The NAGC (2010) standard focused on Learning and Development states, “Teachers enable students to identify their preferred approaches to learning, accommodate these preferences and expand them” (p. 1). Tasks that have multiple solution paths give students the opportunity to engage in discourse to learn of others’ strategies and weigh their merits. Ultimately, underachieving gifted students might take stake in the task and further their potential. **THP**

References

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ported in their pursuit of improved understanding of equitable and inequitable practices and refrain from incorporating the latter. Making diversity and equity an “issue” that needs to be addressed defeats the premise of building an inclusive culture and climate in your gifted program that occurs naturally.

Starting the year off right is not only critical for teachers, but also for students, as it sets the tone for the entire year. These suggestions are offered as a launch to developing a more equitable gifted program or school. Although the suggestions

are not exhaustive, they can be implemented to create a more inclusive gifted program, serving as a starting point for a successful school year. **THP**

Reference

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