

# A Social Justice Issue

Seldom can we open our social media pages or review popular contemporary books that speak to the state of the nation that we don't read about the phenomenon of 'social justice'. Many years ago, as I began this work, I recognized two caveats:

1. As long as gifted programs were being funded by local, state, and federal funds, it was critical that every child, regardless of race, culture, or income, with high potential have access to what we call 'gifted education and advanced learner programming', and
2. Gifted and high ability students from racially, culturally, and economically diverse populations (particularly Black, Latinx, Native American) are under-represented and thus, underserved by gifted education programs.

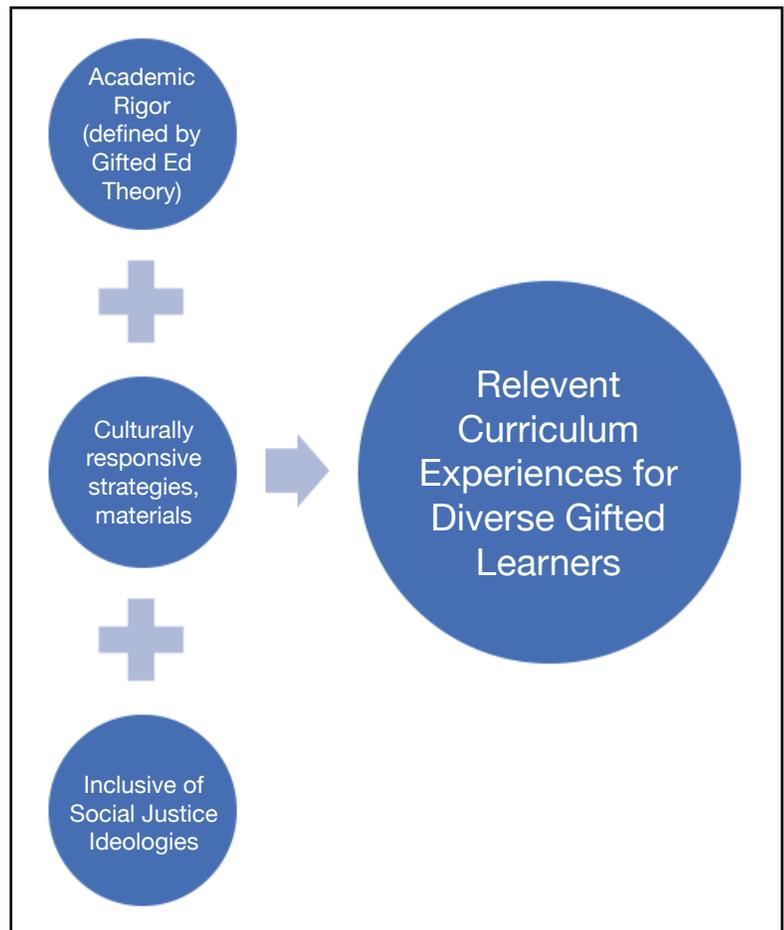
Thus, in order to bring gifted education programs into the social justice conversations that are brewing across the nation, we must see it for what it is. According to Belle (2019), *social justice education is centered in democracy and the freedom to exercise one's full humanity*. When I read that definition, I am compelled to believe that social justice is the most important framework that we use to address the needs of gifted students from racially and culturally diverse groups today.

Social justice is not the new term of the day, it is not something that we will hear less of in years to come. As a matter of fact, I believe that social justice will be the core of educational conversations, new frameworks, and new ideologies as we move forward as a field. Social justice encompasses the human, social, educational, and economic needs of all citizens.

I appreciate and respect the definition noted earlier because the author uses the term 'one's full humanity'. Gifted students from diverse backgrounds are fully human just as other gifted learners are. An individual's gender, social class, or race does not take away from their humanity. As we evolve as educators, we should be learning more and more about the importance of how we can no longer teach all gifted students the same way (using a colorblind or genderblind approach) and expect them to respond in a positive way—demonstrating their very best potential.

We also recognize that most gifted learners are very empathetic, deeply sensitive to the needs of their peers and humanity in general. We read regular accounts of gifted students launching campaigns to feed the homeless, fight against gun violence, lead protests to speak out against police brutality, and

create plans for environmental awareness. As such, many of these students will become the most outspoken among their schoolmates. Their own concern for social justice will become a key factor in how they receive (or not) the education that is being provided for them. Without regard for cultural and individual differences, we are missing critical opportunities to fully engage, nurture, and bring out the best in all gifted learners in our school communities. In order to do this, we must be prepared to fully embrace social justice ideologies as we engage educators in the change process required to equitably identify gifted students. This engagement will require significant change in gifted education as we know it today. Listed below are a few tips to deconstruct this major change process in our school communities as we aim to address the academic, intellec-



**Figure 1.** Ideal relevant curriculum experiences for Diverse Gifted Learners (Davis, J.L. 2019)

tual and psychosocial needs of our racially and culturally diverse gifted learners:

- Accept and fully integrate social justice ideologies (history and daily impact of implicit bias, microaggressions, codeswitching, color blindness, white privilege, etc) into gifted education training programs.
- Ensure that all teachers of the gifted have knowledge of basic social justice terminologies and their histories
- Allow time during training for teachers to have open conversations about their belief systems as related to systemic practices related to identification of gifted students (Who can be gifted?)
- Create panel discussions with racially and culturally diverse students as panelists to share their experiences with gifted and advanced learner classrooms;
- Ensure that all curriculum and instructional materials are representative, culturally responsive, and historically authentic;
- Incorporate rich and frequent visits/engagements by teachers in racially and culturally diverse communities, including hosting gifted education information sessions at community sites; and
- As teacher leaders, gifted education personnel should be prepared to become trainers and lead the efforts in the anti-bias awareness and training in their school communities

As shown in the Figure 1, ideally, a school's instructional programs for gifted students from racially and culturally diverse origins should integrate instructional rigor, culturally responsive strategies and resources, and social justice ideologies to meet the needs of a changing student population. The suggestions offered in this brief column provide a beginning for what should be a major paradigm shift in our programming and services for the best and brightest from all communities. We have so much more to do to ensure that gifted programs are 'socially just' for all of our students. **THP**

#### Resources

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as students explain and defend their new, unique, or varied ways of relating problems to prior knowledge or other problems, strategies for approaching solving the problem, or mathematical insights, ideas, or questions that can be communicated to others. **THP**

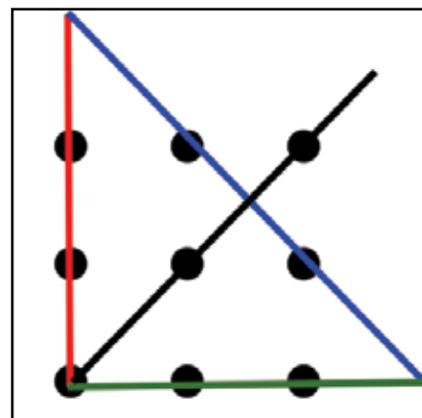
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