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Equitable Identification Practices

Mary Cay Ricci



Equitable identification of gifted students. If only there were a perfect system that schools and districts across the country could adapt (sigh). Unfortunately, there is not--in fact, because a national process for identification of gifted and talented students does not exist, it is not only possible, but likely that you could have one foot in one district and the other in another district and learn that one is gifted and the other is not (or perhaps needs to be rescreened at a later time).

Additionally, it is not possible to develop a completely equitable identification process--no cognitive assessment is completely bias-free and all educators are not completely bias-free. What you will find in this article are the components of a system that seeks to be as equitable as possible.

Consider the following definition of giftedness: *Giftedness is a developmental process that is domain-specific and malleable.* (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius & Worrell, 2011)

Think for a minute about this definition of giftedness and its implications for an equitable identification process:

- **Developmental** = Because gifted behaviors can be developmental, any processes put in place should provide many opportunities to identify students for advanced academic services. If ongoing opportunities to include students in enriched and accelerated learning are missed, it is likely that many children will have school experiences that will include a series of missed opportunities. This is especially relevant for our traditionally underserved students. Gifted programming should also have on and off ramps, as students' instructional needs can change over time. Students should have many entry points and on occasion, opportunities to exit a course or program, only after support and monitoring have been put in place. Advanced learning opportunities are never "sink or swim"; gaps in learning can surface with all kinds of learners.

- **Domain-specific** = The identification process should match students with opportunities for them to soar in content areas where they have the capacity, potential, or motivation to do so.

Advanced learning opportunities are never "sink or swim"; gaps in learning can surface with all kinds of learners.

Letter From the President



Dear Members of The Association for the Gifted (TAG),

CEC has a new membership benefit about which you will want to be aware. All Premier Members automatically receive \$250,000 of professional liability insurance, with no increase to their dues.

Springtime brings the CEC Convention in Boston. Session leaders have been notified about their sessions. A very good array of topics related to gifted children, twice-exceptional children, as well as best practices and research related to gifted education will be on the program. You won't want to miss the opportunity to interact with colleagues who share your interest in gifted education.

Stay tuned in for news related to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The possibilities for using Title I and Title II funds is better than ever before as gifted is listed as a category for which those funds can be designated. It is important to stay in the conversations in schools and school districts that are related to ESSA.

Sincerely,
Julia Link Roberts
President, TAG

Dear TAG Members,

In this issue of *The Update*, please find the lead article titled "Equitable Identification Practices," written by Mary Kay Ricci, an educational consultant and school administrator.

Dr. Julia Roberts, "Speaking Out" columnist, has written an article about finding stakeholders to help advocate for gifted students. You will also find abstracts from the articles published in the most recent edition of *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* (JEG). Remember that your membership entitles you to online access to the journal.

The 2017 Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) conference will be held in Boston, Massachusetts, from April 19 to 22. Please plan to join us there!

Best regards,
Kimberley L. Chandler
TAG Update Editor



TAG Board Meeting at the Texas Association for the Gifted & Talented (TAGT) conference



TAG Board of Directors, 2016



TAG President Julia Roberts presents Elaine Dumas with the TAG Service Award at the TAG BOD meeting.



TAG President Julia Roberts presents Joel McIntosh with the TAG Service Award at the TAG BOD meeting.



SAVE THE DATE!

The CEC Convention & Expo will be in Boston
 April 19-22, 2017
www.cecconvention.org/



Speaking Out: Advocacy

Julia Link Roberts

Advocating to Make a Difference

Sometimes a good question leads a decision-maker to speak out on behalf of gifted children. An example of such a question follows. The state gifted association asked districts to highlight something outstanding that was being done in the district for gifted children. One gifted coordinator thought about the task and decided to schedule a time to discuss this question with the superintendent. What shall we highlight about gifted education in our district? Only during this time together did the superintendent realize how limited funding for gifted education was. In fact, the discussion led to an increase in funding – the result of asking a good question of someone with the decision-making power and the resources to make a difference.

All people are not equal in their capacity to “make things happen.” If you are talking about the school or school district, decision-makers set policy and implement best practices. At the school level, there may be a school council and, at the district level, the school board and leaders at the top may have more influence than others. Those are the people with whom to share information about what research says about a policy that is being considered or that you would like to have implemented.

If there is a policy you would like to have included in legislation, there are three groups who have more influence than others for matters that will likely affect gifted education – the leadership of the House and Senate, the Education Committee, and the Appropriations or Budget Committee. They are the doorkeepers for legislation that impacts gifted education. Your state legislature has a committee in which bills with funding originate. Bills that focus on education must start in the Education Committee. If members of a particular committee are not interested, they can see that the bill never sees the light of day (it doesn't move beyond the committee).

It is so important for advocates for gifted education to be informed about the ways to make changes happen. The chance to initiate changes in policy and legislation improves dramatically when advocates know how to approach decision-makers. It is so important for gifted education advocates to “speak out” on behalf of children who need educational opportunities that will ensure their academic growth and well-being.

The chance to initiate changes in policy and legislation improves dramatically when advocates know how to approach decision-makers.

REMEMBER – IF NOT YOU, THEN WHO?

IN MEMORY



The Reverend Ivy Haynes Jr., Pastor of Greater New Hope Baptist Church and an educator for Fort Worth Independent School District, died on October 9, 2016, at his residence. He served on the TAG Board of Directors from 2016 to 2017.

Join CEC-TAG, the nation's most dynamic professional association devoted to twice-exceptional children, educational excellence, and diversity.

MEMBER BENEFITS

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the leading voice for special and gifted education. CEC-TAG establishes professional standards for teacher preparation for the field, develops initiatives to improve gifted education practice, and ensures that the needs of children and youth with exceptionalities are met in educational legislation.

Become a member of a team of professionals devoted to (a) improving educational opportunities for individuals from all diverse groups with gifts, talents, and/or high potential; (b) sponsoring and fostering activities to develop the field of gifted education; (c) supporting and encouraging specialized professional preparation for educators; and (d) working with organizations, agencies, families, or individuals who are interested in promoting the welfare and education of children and youth.

Member benefits include:

- Four issues of the *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* (JEG) per year (includes online access to current and past issues)
- Six issues of *Teaching Exceptional Children* per year
- Two issues of the online journal *Excellence and Diversity in Gifted Education* (EDGE) per year
- Four issues of *Exceptional Children* per year
- Quarterly newsletters from CEC and from CEC-TAG
- A discounted member rate for all meetings of CEC and TAG
- 30% discount on all CEC products
- 10% discount on Prufrock Press products
- Peer-to-peer support
- A network of colleagues who are leaders in the field of gifted education

To join CEC-TAG, go to <http://cectag.com/membership/> or contact Yara Farah, Membership Chair, at ynfarah@wm.edu.

Journal for the Education of the Gifted

The *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* (JEG), the official journal of CEC-TAG, offers information and research on the educational and psychological needs of gifted and talented children. Devoted to excellence in educational research and scholarship, the journal acts as a forum for diverse ideas and points of view on gifted education, counseling, and parenting. The December 2016 issue of JEG will be arriving in your mailbox soon. The article abstracts are shared below. Should you be interested in submitting a proposal to the journal, please visit <http://jeg.sagepub.com>. In addition, Dr. Tracy L. Cross, Editor-in-Chief, is always looking for reviewers. Please e-mail the journal at cfgejeg@wm.edu if you would like to be added to the reviewer list.

ABSTRACTS FOR JEG, DECEMBER 2016, 39(4)

Gifted Secondary School Students: The Perceived Relationship Between Enrichment and Goal Valuation, Carla B. Brigandi, Del Siegle, Jennie M. Weiner, E. Jean Gubbins, and Catherine A. Little - Grounded in the Enrichment Triad and Achievement Orientation Models, this qualitative case study builds understanding of the relationship between participation in Type III Enrichment and the achievement orientation attitude of goal valuation in gifted secondary school students. Participants included 10 gifted secondary school students, their parents, and their classroom teacher. Data included student, parent, and teacher responses in semistructured interviews, short answer surveys, and student work. Findings indicate a relationship between participation in enrichment and goal valuation. Students engaged in Type III Enrichment perceived their projects as interesting, beneficial, and/or as related to perceptions of identity. Additionally, factors of goal valuation related to students' continued interest and perceptions of enjoyment after completion of the enrichment projects. These findings have implications for structuring gifted education programs that meet the special needs of gifted secondary school learners.

Assessing Gifted Students' Beliefs About Intelligence With a Psychometrically Defensible Scale, Sunhee Park, Carolyn M. Callahan, and Ji Hoon Ryoo - The psychometric qualities of the 6- and 8- item implicit theories of intelligence scales that Dweck (2000) suggested were compared using a confirmatory factor analysis with data from 239 gifted students (100 students in grades 5–7, 139 students in grades 8–11). The results indicate that the 6-item scale fits the data better than the 8-item scale. The factor reliabilities of data from the 6-item scale were 0.853 for the entity theory and 0.878 for the incremental theory. We found evidence for measurement invariance across age and gender using measurement and structural invariance tests. Using the scale to investigate the beliefs about intelligence of gifted students and the association between their beliefs about intelligence and goal orientations, we found that the higher the incremental theory held by gifted students, the higher the learning goals they tend to pursue. Older students had a greater tendency to hold an entity theory than younger students.

Legal Update of Gifted Education, Perry A. Zirkel - This update of the legislation/regulations and case law specific to pre-K–12 gifted students since a cluster of publications in 2004–2005 primarily focuses on the “gifted alone” category, with only secondary attention to twice-exceptional and other students in the “gifted plus” category. For the gifted alone category, the legislation and regulations during the most recent 11 years continue to be at the state, rather than federal level, with a net change amounting to moderate strengthening, primarily in terms of the group, rather than IDEA-type, model. The corresponding case law remains very limited in both frequency and pro-plaintiff outcomes, with most of the cases arising in Pennsylvania. The gifted-plus category accounts for far more litigation, fueled by the intersecting federal civil rights laws that are pivotal in these cases. Yet, their outcomes, for a variety of issues that extend well beyond eligibility and free appropriate public education have also reflected a pro-district skew.

Gifted English Language Learners: Global Understandings and Australian Perspectives, Aranzazu M. Blackburn, Linley Cornish, and Susen Smith - Current research on gifted English language learners (gifted ELLs) is broadly centered on identification issues and investigations of underrepresentation in gifted programs mainly in schools in the United States and referencing predominantly Spanish-speaking students. Australia presents itself as a multicultural nation, yet limited research exists as to what it knows about its particular gifted ELL populations and ways of supporting them when they enter Australian schools. A review of the current literature examines existing research in the United States and explores the findings from Australian studies. Some suggestions for future research in both local and global contexts are offered.

- **Malleable**= Thanks to neuroscience, we now have a better understanding of how malleable our brains are. Students may not demonstrate high potential or achievement if opportunities have not existed to connect those neurons and exercise those brains. The more challenge that a child is exposed to, the “smarter” he/she gets. Many traditionally underserved children just do not get the mental exercise that they need to nurture academic talent. Both parents and educators can contribute to this lack of mental exercise. Teachers will sometimes have low expectations for students that they perceive to be on the “lower” end of the continuum based on outdated, preconceived notions about what “gifted” should look like in a classroom.

Specific Equitable Identification Recommendations

The following recommendations are both research-based and experienced-based. Information gathered through my experiences and observations in gifted and talented departments in the central office of three large school districts has contributed greatly to the following

First, let's all agree that education for gifted, advanced learners and high-potential learners is non-negotiable. Accelerated, enriched, and rigorous learning opportunities MUST be available in the classroom from PreK-12.

recommendations. I have been involved in collaborating with others in making decisions, establishing criteria, and working toward making sure that the needs of gifted, advanced, and high potential students from all backgrounds are being met. I have seen processes that work but more often than not, I have seen processes that do not work. This

experience, coupled with a more contemporary view of “giftedness” has led me to the following recommendations for an equitable ID process. My vision is child-centric, all about what a child needs instructionally. It is less about a “label” and more about instructional “needs.”

First, let's all agree that education for gifted, advanced learners, and high-potential learners is non-negotiable. Accelerated, enriched, and rigorous learning opportunities MUST be available in the classroom from preK-12. This does not mean that formal identification processes should be in place beginning in pre-kindergarten. Instead, access to challenging and rigorous instruction should be in place for any student who needs it or is willing to struggle a bit with it. This access must be available as soon as students walk into school. I refer to this as differentiated, responsive instruction (Ricci, 2013). Respond to the instructional needs of all students at the front end of instruction. If students

are consistently under-challenged, they will not have opportunities to build academic resiliency.

The students who demonstrate already developed abilities are easy to find. In fact, in many cases all an identification process does is confirm what you already know based on a child's performance in school. An equitable identification process should focus on those students whose potential may not be as obvious. What are some of the most important components in an identification system that seeks to be as equitable as possible?

- **Multiple criteria:** Multiple data points should be collected. Gifted and talented identification should not be the outcome based on a single data point/score.

- **Universal screening:** Nomination systems are not equitable. I will repeat that: nomination systems are not equitable. No matter how much professional learning and guidance is provided to teachers, prejudices and misunderstandings about kids exist deep within some educators. There are still some teachers who over-value good behavior, good grades, and conformity. The high-energy child who questions the relevancy of assignments may not be nominated for gifted screening because these behaviors may be interpreted negatively or not recognized as gifted behaviors. Universal screening means that all data are collected for all students at the identified grade level(s). A “test” should not serve as the first hoop to jump through before additional data are collected.

- **Cognitive abilities assessment:** This kind of assessment seeks to capture a student's developed abilities in nonverbal, verbal, and/or quantitative reasoning. Perceived weakness in one of these areas should not disqualify a student from services. Why? Because cognitive assessments do NOT measure innate ability; they measure developed abilities in specific kinds of reasoning. If students have not had an opportunity to develop these specific reasoning abilities that are tested, then their scores will not be an accurate reflection of their potential. When too much emphasis is placed on test scores, inequity occurs.

- **Teacher observational checklists/surveys-** Any teacher “checklists” must have characteristics/behaviors listed that do not favor a specific gender, race, language, culture, etc. These checklists should be completed for every student BEFORE the teachers see any test scores. Teachers can be unconsciously influenced by the test scores. Perhaps your school or district does not have funding to purchase a paper or digital version of a teacher checklist and prefers to develop your own. If this is the case, when researching behaviors to include in a locally developed checklist, be sure to include non-traditional characteristics of gifted students. Also, recruit the assistance of your research/evaluation office and norm the checklist to your population

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before using it across an entire grade level. Review and tweak the checklist each year as needed. For example, in one district we noticed that students scored higher in creativity behaviors when teachers provided opportunities to see creativity. If a teacher did not provide these opportunities, the checklist made it appear that the kids lacked creativity. Also, because a classroom teacher is being asked to complete a teacher checklist for every student, provide at least a six-week window to complete them and keep the checklist succinct. This school year my district will be piloting the HOPE Scale (Prufrock Press) in our 140 elementary schools. This particular tool was developed with diverse populations in mind and is concise.

- **Achievement data points:** These should be considered in the areas where the program is focused. For example, a Lexile range for students who may be participating in a rigorous reading/English group or course can be used and considered as a data point. Another example is that a student may not “make-it” on the test but have strength/motivation and resiliency when it comes to math or reading. These students may have unmet academic needs and be under-challenged in their current situation. Include any appropriate achievement data points for these students so that they will qualify for the instruction that they need. On a side note, you may have some high achieving students who do not qualify based on your district’s criteria. Have this “loophole” included in to your policy. These kids may have the same instructional needs, but they did not meet your district’s particular criteria. Give them what they need instructionally, regardless of GT Identification.

- **Advocacy:** This provides an opportunity for teachers to advocate for students who may not surface using traditional processes for identification. Teachers may submit written advocacy statements/observations, recommend a portfolio review, present anecdotal records, or come to the table and advocate in person.

Did you notice what is missing? A parent survey or checklist. This is one that I struggle with...I know that parents can contribute valuable information about their children and we can learn more about our students’ potential from parents. The issue is that if a parent survey or checklist is part of an identification process, you have to decide happens when it is not returned. What if you do not have it translated into a language that the parent speaks? Would students gain or lose identification “points” based on whether or not their parents understood or returned the form? I urge caution when using a parent checklist, as it may not be an equitable piece of the puzzle.

Another thing to think about, if identification of gifted is not related to funding, then it is also possible to go through this process and identify programming and services that the child needs without identifying the child. This allows for a more fluid instructional experience for the child. Adopting a philosophy that focuses on the instructional experiences rather than labeling of the child would favor many children, especially those kids on the cusp of being identified and twice-exceptional students. It can also help address the need for domain-specific learning experiences for students who need more challenge in specific content areas rather than across the board. Ideally, the cognitive assessment should not have the most weight. Determining program and service needs should be a combination of factors. Avoid use of “cut-off” scores. Think about the words “cut-off”; children could likely be cut off from the instruction that they need! Instead, have target ranges.

After any identification process is put in place, a yearly review of the outcome and recommendations for improvement should take place. At a minimum, review identification data by the following: gender, race, poverty, English language learners, and special education students. Does the demographic breakdown mirror your school or district population? Is your identification process equitable? Does it open doors for students of all backgrounds?

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Society Member Activation Instructions for your SAGE Journals Online (SJO) Account

The electronic version of the Journal for the Education of the Gifted (JEG) is available through SAGE Journals Online (SJO). To activate your account please follow these steps:

1. Go to the SAGE Journals Online site: <https://online.sagepub.com/cgi/activate/basic>.
2. Where it says "Activate Your Online Subscription:" enter your Member ID then select The Association for the Gifted-CEC (TAG-CEC) from the Society drop down menu and click "Submit."
3. On the "Instructions" page be sure to check your personal data. Enter a username and password and click submit to confirm activation. Do not click the Journal Title link until the confirmation process is complete.
4. Once complete, return to the electronic Journal homepage and select the Journal cover for access to the current issue or click "Current Issue."
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The username and password you create you will use when returning to the site <http://jeg.sagepub.com/>. If you forget your username or password, go to the "Subscribe" tab and look for the link "What to do if you forget your User Name and/or Password" under "Managing your Subscription to Journal for the Education of the Gifted" which will take you to the following link <http://online.sagepub.com/cgi/recnamepwd>. You will be asked to provide some information about yourself. Upon confirmation of the information your username and/or password will be emailed to you.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

KIMBERLEY CHANDLER - *klchan@wm.edu*

Dr. Kimberley Chandler is the Curriculum Director at the Center for Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary and a Clinical Assistant Professor. Her professional background includes teaching gifted students in a variety of settings, serving as an administrator of a school district gifted program, and providing professional development for teachers and administrators nationally and internationally. Kimberley has served as the editor and contributing author of numerous curriculum materials from the Center for Gifted Education. She co-authored a CEC-TAG Educational Resource (with Dr. Tamra Stambaugh) titled *Effective Curriculum for Underserved Gifted Students* and is the co-editor (with Cheryl Adams) of the CEC-TAG Educational Resource *Effective Program Models for Gifted Students From Underserved Populations*. Currently Kimberley is the Network Representative on the NAGC Board of Directors, and the editor of the CEC-TAG newsletter *The Update*.

MARY CAY RICCI - *marycayr@msn.com*

Mary Cay Ricci is a member of the CEC-TAG board. She is the author of THE New York Times best seller, *Mindsets in the Classroom*, its partner book, *Ready to Use Resources for Mindsets in the Classroom*, and *Mindsets for Parents*. She is currently the Supervisor of Advanced and Enriched Instruction in Prince Georges County Public Schools, Maryland. Mary Cay is also a faculty associate for Johns Hopkins University Graduate School of Education. Mary Cay holds a master's degree that includes certification in gifted and talented education from Johns Hopkins University.

JULIA LINK ROBERTS - *julia.roberts@wku.edu*

Dr. Julia Link Roberts, Mahurin Professor of Gifted Studies at Western Kentucky University, is Executive Director of the Carol Martin Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science in Kentucky and The Center for Gifted Studies. Dr. Roberts is on the Executive Committee of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children and is past-president of The Association for the Gifted. Her writing focuses on differentiation, gifted education, and advocacy. She received the 2011 Acorn Award as the outstanding professor at a Kentucky four-year university, the first NAGC David Belin Advocacy Award, the 2012 NAGC Distinguished Service Award, and the 2011 William T. Nallia Award for innovative leadership from the Kentucky Association for School Administrators.