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Abstract

This article is based on Grantham's commentary on an eminence-focused gifted education model developed by Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell. Grantham primarily reviews the model from an equity perspective, taking into account the changing demographics in the nation's public schools. Specifically, Grantham asserts that education leaders want and need forward-thinking models that address race and class issues because public school populations are increasingly browner and poorer, unlike many gifted program enrollments that tend to represent students from White and middle-class backgrounds. Underrepresentation in gifted programs among minorities (particularly Blacks and Hispanics) and low-income students plagues our field and turns off many public school advocates to gifted education. Education leaders may embrace new models when they squarely address the reality that circa 2020, public schools will be majority minority. Researchers stand a better chance of gaining traction to move the field forward when their model shows promise for involving greater numbers of students representing our pluralistic society. To rethink giftedness and gifted education, Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell rely on works from psychology; however, important past and present perspectives from psychologists who have researched underrepresented groups and equity issues are excluded. Education leaders may recognize this omission and view the eminence-focused approach (and perhaps its underlying paradigm) as a less novel model and more of a perpetuation of the same status quo in gifted education. In sum, Grantham's commentary encourages scholars not to depart from a legacy of addressing excellence and equity through new models that move the field forward.

Keywords

equity, definition and/or conception of giftedness/talent, gifted Black students, gifted Hispanic students, special populations/underserved gift, low income students, assessment, identification, majority-minority public schools

In preparing comments to contribute to this special issue, I engaged in a range of tasks to gather my thoughts and frame my reactions to the article written by Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2011) to help our field rethink giftedness and gifted education and, thus, move the field in the next century. I read and pondered various sections multiple times to grasp the focus and identify areas that stood out to me as a researcher whose work focuses primarily on underrepresented racially different and low-income gifted students. I read and filtered my colleagues' discussion through an equity lens, looking for ways in which the ideas related to underrepresented gifted populations, specifically Black and Hispanic students, and students from low-income backgrounds.

To state the obvious, it is important that a proposed model conceptualized to move the field of gifted education forward take into account principles associated with high standards (excellence) as well as race and class issues (equity) as the cultural landscape of our nation's public schools is increasingly more different from the historical mainstream population. While I believe that Subotnik et al. (2011) pretty

much covered the excellence side of the equation, the discussion surrounding equity issues gave me pause. According to the U.S. Department of Education projections (Hussar & Bailey, 2011), public school enrollment by race will soon be majority-minority; as of 2008, approximately 45% of public schools were Hispanic, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native (see Table 1).

The browning of public schools will continue to increase through 2020, and by 2050 minority student enrollment will exceed that of White students. Furthermore, we can expect a large and meaningful increase in low-income students, especially those who are Hispanic and Black.

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Table 1. Actual 2008 and Projected 2020 Change in Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools by Race/Ethnicity

Race/ethnicity	2008 Actual enrollment	2008 Percentage	2020 Projected enrollment	2020 Percentage	Enrollment change from 2008 to 2020	Percentage change from 2008 to 2020
American Indian/ Alaska Native	592	1	691	1	99	17
Asian/Pacific Islander	2,461	5	3,338	7	877	36
Black	8,399	17	8,481	16	82	1
Hispanic	10,621	22	13,289	25	2,668	25
White	27,191	55	26,814	51	-377	-1
Total	49,264	100	52,613	100	3,349	7

Source. Adapted from Hussar and Bailey (2011).

Regarding underrepresentation, the following questions guided thoughts and reactions expressed herein: In what ways does the proposed model encourage teachers and educational leaders to meaningfully conceptualize the need for excellence *and* equity? How does the proposed model authentically and equitably call attention to ongoing and common barriers in the identification and development of ability and achievement among underrepresented groups, particularly Black, Hispanic, and low-income students (hereafter also referred to as BHL students)?

I first considered words of wisdom from Renzulli regarding eminence to draw implications for educational leaders as they weigh the value of Subotnik et al.'s (2011) model. Scholarly eminence is a function of

A strong thesis, a supportive research background, and then, as Dr. Torrance always said, "acceptance finding," getting people to accept it is a function of how well people communicate. (Renzulli, personal communication for documentary, see Grantham, 2011).

Subotnik et al. articulated a strong thesis to frame their approach to gifted education, and provided a wealth of supportive empirical research and relevant literature, much of which is grounded in psychology and gifted education research and literature.

Eminence-Focused Gifted Education

Subotnik et al.'s (2011) model offers a strikingly interesting emphasis on eminence, defined as those who make "a significant contribution to improving or enhancing the human condition" (p. 13). This terminology helps us rethink the purpose of gifted education by offering an elevated paradigm that sets the bar beyond identifying prodigies, precocity in elementary school, or outstanding achievement in middle and high school. They articulate a new goal of gifted education: adulthood eminence. This lofty goal requires educational leaders to consider the trajectory for various

talent domains and the processes that nurture students' potential, with the understanding that educational leaders must create the expectation for students to choose to fully develop and use their talents across stages of their life span.

Subotnik et al. (2011) contend that gifted children need to become eminent producers to be considered gifted as adults and that we, as a society, have the right to expect eminent-level outcomes for our investment in developing gifted students' abilities: "The goal [of gifted education] is to develop the talents of children and youth at the upper ends of the distribution in all fields of endeavor to maximize those individuals' lifetime contributions to society" (p. 23). This eminence goal will plant in the minds of educational leaders a need to identify and present developmentally appropriate opportunities for students to not only demonstrate excellent performance but also to be motivated to consistently produce extraordinary ideas and works from early childhood to adulthood.

Implementation of Eminence-Focused Gifted Education for Underrepresented Groups

As Ford (2011) has noted, the bane of our field's progress is underrepresentation. Litigation, debates, and concerns abound regarding why underrepresentation exists and is so prevalent, along with what can be done to remedy this entrenched problem. Therefore, we must expect a visionary model that seeks to move the field forward to consider extensively equity and underrepresented BHL students. What promise does the proposed model hold for such underrepresented groups? Are the benefits direct or tangential? Although Subotnik et al. (2011) propose to move the field forward, it cannot do so if attention to underrepresented groups is indirect or inconsequential.

Consider the work of Mary M. Frasier. The role of educational leaders in the promotion of Subotnik et al.'s model for underrepresented groups, particularly for Black, Hispanic,

and low-income students, seems incomplete without attention to Frasier's (1997) four As: attitude, access, assessment, and accommodation. Below, Frasier's guidelines are discussed with respect to components of Subotnik et al.'s eminence-focused model.

Attitude refers to a mental position, feeling, or emotion toward the prevalence and possibility of eminence in Black, Hispanic, or low-income students. For many reasons, the vast majority of students differ demographically (race and class) from "typical" eminent persons, particularly in the academic domain. Too frequently, deficit thinking and negative stereotypes (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008) contribute to recruitment and retention barriers, interfering with educators' skills at seeing gifts and talents in such students. Because the majority of gifted education teachers are White with little training in multicultural gifted education (Ford, 2011), culturally based displays of characteristics associated with Subotnik et al.'s domain trajectories and related transitions may cause students to be overlooked. Frasier's research encourages educational leaders to be reflective about their attitudes and beliefs and how thinking influences behaviors and actions. What negative personal or societal information about eminence in BHL groups create barriers? What beliefs about the past and/or present history of underrepresented groups or their families hinder teachers from working collaboratively with them or their community?

Educational leaders must be prepared to address these questions and model positive attitudes and actions beyond the search for childhood gifts and talents to identify potential that can lead to a domain trajectory for adulthood eminence. An important first step in appropriately identifying students for programs that nurture eminent producers is to be clear about what eminence is and is not. Subotnik et al. offer vivid descriptions and figures to explain their thesis, but with little attention to cultural differences. Educational leaders will have to be deliberate and conscientious in translating the generalized model to underrepresented populations. Given the magnitude and prevalence of race and class disparities, a proposed forward looking model needs to directly address attitudes and underrepresentation relative to BHL students.

Access, inferring from Frasier, refers to ways in which underrepresented students become considered for placement in eminence-focused programs. Too often, educators hold low academic expectations for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students, an issue that has been studied for decades. As a result, teachers often fail to create appropriate opportunities in classrooms for underrepresented students to demonstrate their abilities. An unchallenging learning environment that is culturally unresponsive does little to prepare underrepresented students to be viable candidates for future eminence. Low expectations are compounded when educational leaders do not have the skills to train teachers how to recognize behaviors associated with early stages of eminence expressed by underrepresented students in nontraditional

ways (Sternberg, 2007; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2005). Frasier's work highlights the reality that, even when provided with common characteristics associated with typical and atypical gifted students, many educators still struggle to recognize these characteristics, particularly if students are minority underachievers, are from low-income backgrounds, or speak nonmainstream English. Educational leaders must consider the influence of culture and environment on the manifestation of domain-specific talents expressed by different racial and ethnic groups, and the effects that they have on teacher referrals and students' performance and products. This point was missing from Subotnik et al.'s model of where we have been, where we are, and where we need to go. The vision must not be myopic.

Assessment refers to the entire process of appraising, estimating, and evaluating the presence and degree of performance or production (Frasier, 1997) in the start-potential stage, peak-achievement stage, or end-eminence stage. Educational leaders must prevent the tendency for teachers to be hasty and to collect too little data or culturally insensitive data in the assessment process. For Subotnik et al.'s model to be implemented effectively, multiple developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive measures are critical in the assessment of various domains. Educational leaders must be mindful of potential biases and how they contribute to narrow assessment policies and practices and, thus, create or maintain barriers for underrepresented groups. For example, there is an overreliance on biased or unfair instruments to determine a child's gifted potential; many of these measures have a history favoring White, middle-class, native English speakers, which remains problematic today given the reality that public schools across the nation will enroll greater numbers of minority students than Whites. Alternative, culturally sensitive tools are essential, with the need for all instruments to be valid and reliable for underrepresented students.

Accommodation refers to program design and curricular experiences intended to support the developmental and motivational needs and interests of students (Frasier, 1997). Educational leaders must be proactive and vigilant about making changes when program designs and curricula experiences do not address different cultural and linguistic needs of Black and Hispanic students. The absence of expectations and guidance for educational leaders to accommodate differences can reduce BHL students' motivation and demonstration of ability to competence, to expertise, and to eminence. To accommodate students' needs, cultural and linguistic differences cannot be ignored or discounted; instead, Frasier argued that educators must view students' experiences in a positive way and adapt their teaching styles and curricula accordingly, making them more culturally responsive. In addition, educators must involve parents, families, and the community to make the programmatic and curricular experiences equitable, authentic, and culturally relevant for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students.

Can Educational Leaders Get People to Accept Eminence-Focused Gifted Education?

It is this last part of Renzulli's comment about eminent scholars (quoted earlier) that gave me pause, encouraging greater reflection on the model in light of educational leaders representing schools with wide degrees of underrepresentation and those resistant to gifted programs. According to Renzulli, prior to the contributions of Dr. Alexinia Baldwin and Dr. Mary Frasier, "most people thought that gifted was strictly done for White kids in White schools by White teachers and by White teacher trainers" (Grantham, 2011).

As I reflect on over 20 years of interactions as a professional educator working with students, parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators in many different kinds of schools (e.g., majority minority schools, majority White schools; mixed-race schools, and Title I schools), there is often tentative support for gifted programs that has much to do with negative views of the race and class of gifted students enrolled. Although some attention to these issues is mentioned by Subotnik et al., is it discussed enough to get school administrators to buy into the model? Many educational leaders in urban, mixed-income, or even rural communities will examine—critique—the model with respect to their cultural context, and they will want to know how this model takes their students and needs into account. I can imagine many educators asking themselves,

Is this model a way to move forward or is it more of the same? Is this model a new-jack way to attract the same kinds of White middle class students to gifted programs? Does this model represent a new way to conceptualize a segregated or private school experience in a public school?

Consider this: Even though it is likely not to have been Subotnik et al.'s intent, concluding that the "best bang for the buck" (p. 36) is aligned with high opportunity, highly motivated students (i.e., the most advantaged students) is *code* to many people that an eminence-focused program is for *White middle-class students*. It smacks of academic triage—who is salvageable and who is not? Students without social capital or without White privilege, as characterized in Subotnik et al.'s (2011) model, "low opportunity," "low/undetermined motivation students," are the "greatest challenge to society," but certainly "worthy of investment in opportunity" (p. 36). Black and Hispanic students and low-income students often fall into this category (recall Frasier's first A: *Attitudes*) and optimistic educational leaders working with these students may find Subotnik et al.'s sentiment elitist—a common criticism of our gifted education field and not a place where we wish to remain now and in the future.

Attention to Equity in the Model: Where's the Beef?

Given that race and class inequities are historically and currently the most controversial and significant issues plaguing models used to build programs and services, educational leaders will want the confidence to know that Subotnik et al.'s model can stand up to a fire storm of legitimate equity-oriented criticism. They will want support within the research and literature on which the model is based to find information to help them escape the wrath of gifted education opponents. Unfortunately, educational leaders may be left wanting. Equity issues seem to be whitewashed in the discussion. It is troubling that this model seems to offer little hope for underrepresented groups or students from low-income families to be seriously considered as having a good chance of rising to eminence in educational settings.

Should it be difficult for educational leaders concerned about making gifted education programs excellent and equitable to see their students reflected in a model? A closer look at the terminology and equity-oriented concepts used to build an eminence-focused model may suggest to educational leaders that, while excellence defined by the upper end of performance and production is highly valued, equity is not. A review of the references offered some insight into the level of depth with which equity issues were considered in the development of the model. An informal content analysis of easily identifiable equity related terms (e.g., Black, diversity) revealed that approximately 55 (12%) of 458 references included equity-related terms (approximately 27), which was somewhat encouraging. However, when reviewing the amount of attention that equity-related terms and issues received in the context of the article, I could not ignore that the beef was missing. Out of approximately 31,600 words, 156 (<1%) are squarely equity-related terms and the discussion surrounding these is but a vapor.

One extreme case in point—the terms *Latino* and *Hispanic* are used once! Other terms related to race and class (e.g., Black/African American, White, class, privilege, advantaged, disadvantaged) are either totally absent or sparsely embedded within the discussion. It is 2012 and way beyond the years when it was a challenge or novel to speak about race and class issues. Scholars such as Bernal (1975), Torrance (1977), Frasier (1979), Baldwin (1987), Borland (2004), and Ford (2011) paved the way for us to address equity and to squarely identify underrepresented groups, namely Black, Hispanic, and low-income students. During this day and age when these groups (will) represent a majority of the student population in American public schools, omitting or dismissing substantive discussion of them and equity issues is troublesome and almost inexcusable.

Equity and related terms used in a model are not trivial matters when the focus is on the future and how psychological science can help us rethink giftedness and gifted education. Psychology has much to say about equity issues,

gifted and high-ability students, and the potential for eminence, yet powerful voices from psychology that give attention to underrepresented groups or equity issues are not heard (see, e.g., Hilliard, 1976, 1983, 1990; Neville, Tynes, & Utsey, 2009; Padilla, 1995, 2000; Reyes & Valencia, 1993; Valencia, 1979; Valencia & Lopez, 1992; Valencia & Suzuki, 2001).

Gifted education cannot move forward and have a positive image among the masses until we do a better job of communicating our message and more fully considering the pluralistic nature of our society and the importance of proactively striving to achieve excellence, and perhaps eminence, without continuing to neglect equity. School leaders understand, like Renzulli, that “getting people to accept [that gifted education is for equity] is a function of how well people communicate” (Renzulli, personal communication for documentary, see Grantham, 2011). In efforts to move forward, we must take with us the good and timeless lessons and perspectives of the past—and be careful not to overglorify scholars whose ills have been whitewashed.

For example, Torrance (1974) encouraged us to understand that differences between traditionally identified White middle-class students and minority or low-income students are not deficits. Baldwin, Gear, and Lucito (1978), Frasier and Passow (1994), and Bernal (2007) advanced the field of gifted education with new models that promoted excellence, but not at the expense of equity, particularly related to race and class.

Unlike these early pioneers, Terman advanced biased IQ models of intelligence and created barriers for non-White or low-income people (Hilliard, 1976). He maintained that differences were a function of superiority among Whites. The field of psychology and society at large are yet to overcome the damage Terman caused in the minds of people of all races and income levels. As we rethink gifted education, educational leaders need to know this history and the demeaning politics surrounding Terman’s introduction of intelligence testing in schools in order to address deficit thinking related to Black, Hispanic, and low-income students.

According to Torrance (1974),

It has taken our society a long time to begin accepting and appreciating its pluralistic nature. There has been a widely and strongly held assumption that too much difference will weaken the American way of life. We could never quite admit it, but we also held that there was a superior race and a superior set of cultural characteristics to be emulated and against which all members of our society must be evaluated. While there is much evidence to indicate that these beliefs are still widely and strongly held, there is also evidence that there has been some breakdown of these beliefs, at least among educational leaders interested in the education of gifted students. (p. 471)

Final Thoughts

To increase the likelihood that educational leaders will use new educational models that move the field forward, we must not neglect equity. We must ask ourselves, “are we adequately considering the efficaciousness of terms and the voices of equity-minded scholars, past and present, to help us rethink giftedness and gifted education?” Subotnik et al. must take great care in recasting their eminence model to the public and consider that it does not become a new way of segregating *highly motivated, high-opportunity students* from *low-opportunity*, underrepresented students. Essentially, the term *eminence* is so akin to the term *elite* that the negative or biased connotation of elitism fades away in the discussion of this model, making it acceptable to ignore equity, whitewash history, and to perpetuate White bias and White privilege. I do not believe that this is what Subotnik et al. attempted or desired to do; however, many readers will be pleased with their discussion because it appears to buy into the myth that equity matters less in a “post-racial age” characterized by America’s election of a Black President and a desire to move forward beyond race discussions and associated injustices. More than any other equity-related term, derivations of elite are used throughout Subotnik et al.’s discussion, and elitism in this model may be viewed as a plus by those whose ideology smells of Terman’s sentiments. Indeed, there is an excellence gap (Plucker, Burroughs, & Song, 2010), and it is Subotnik et al.’s aim to fill it by expecting gifted programs to nurture eminence. In doing so, let us not neglect to build equity into the equation.

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Bio

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