

Quick Information Guides for Educators

SNAPshot No 12 - High Ability and Ethnic Diversity

Laurie Walden, Postgraduate Researcher, School of Education, University of Glasgow



High Ability and Ethnic Diversity

The number of ethnically diverse people in the United Kingdom has increased in the past several years. For research and demographic purposes, non-White British persons are referred to as Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME). In the last official census in 2011, 80% of people identified as White; 6.8% were from Asian groups (Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, other); 3.4% were from Black groups; 0.7% were Chinese; 0.4% were Arab; and other groups represented 0.6% (Institute of Race Relations, 2018). Those numbers have increased due to a large number of refugees arriving in the UK since 2015. During the first six months of 2015, more than 220,000 people were said to have crossed the Mediterranean towards Europe.

Although the percentage of BAME students is relatively low in Scotland compared to England, with the arrival of refugee asylum seekers in 2001, Scotland's ethnic diversity has increased. For example, the ethnic diversity of the city of Glasgow increased from 7.2% in 2001 to 15.5% in 2011 (Population and Migration Office of National Statistics). The top three countries of origin in 2015 were Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria (UNHCR). Muslims account for 1.4 per cent of the Scottish population and are the largest non-Christian community (Sarrouh, 2018).

Refugees

The UK prime minister announced on September 7, 2015, that 20,000 Syrian refugees would be resettled in the UK over the next five years. As mentioned above, a large number are being settled in Scotland. Schools and communities have to prepare for their arrival with training to ensure that they are made to feel welcome. Many of them will have experienced traumatic events, including violence, malnutrition, separation and even bereavement. It may be unclear in many circumstances for how long these families and children have been exposed to such adversity (Mitchell, 2015). In addition to being aware of the possible trauma, community and school members need to be aware of the political and media influences that may have generated a range of perceptions about refugee families and children. The way that people understand events will determine how they respond to them.

For schools, it may be a helpful starting point to consider that many of these children show great resilience and cope well with school, seeing it as a place of safety and stability. Children from ethnic minority backgrounds benefit from positive interactions with others from a wide range of backgrounds and where possible should have access to teachers who speak their first language in school (Hek, 2002).

It is equally important to recognize that the effects of trauma can be misinterpreted. There is evidence to suggest that behavioural difficulties such as ADHD or ODD (oppositional defiant disorder) have similar indicators to those demonstrated by children who have experienced trauma (Perry, 2002). Teachers and educators need to be mindful of this when making decisions about children's presenting behaviours. These students need time to make relationships and make sense of their environment. Despite the possibility of trauma, teachers should not automatically assume these children have a deficit. On the contrary, teachers should approach these, and all students of colour, with a strengths-based approach.

Refugee children may struggle to understand the expectations and norms of a UK school environment in terms of how they should relate to others, and what the purpose and function of certain activities is. In terms of highly able pupils, cultural differences may mask high abilities. Cline and Schwartz (1998) argued that in order to determine potential in culturally diverse pupils, educators must gain knowledge of the differences and/or special characteristics of the group. Too often the focus is put on skills already attained instead of helping build and reveal skills by transforming the educational experience for all students (Magro, 2009).

Ethnically Diverse Highly Able Pupils

An ethnically diverse student is likely to be overlooked as highly able for a variety of reasons. Some may have recently entered the UK as a refugee or immigrant and are assumed to have experienced disruption or even trauma, which typically leads schools to focus on perceived deficits. However, most overlooked highly able students are UK citizens whose only difference is their skin colour, but that alone can lead schools to discount their abilities. Systemic racism, also known as Institutional racism, is a form of racism that is embedded in society or an organisation and leads to discrimination. It is seen in school settings through students of colour being overrepresented as having behaviour and learning issues, while being underrepresented as highly able.


A UK study, confirming previous findings in the US, documented that tests are not reliable indicators of giftedness in the case of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, where true ability may be masked (Casey, Smith and Koshy, 2011)


These researchers worked with high potential students in inner-cities for a number of years and have shown that there is hidden, overlooked talent in inner-city schools in the UK. They used a talent development model in working with secondary students from urban settings on Saturdays

A US study by Gentry et al. (2008) found that Black students' attitudes about their own achievement and parental achievement orientation "were the strongest predictors for discriminating among gifted, potentially gifted, average achievers, and underachievers (of) students' attitudes toward reading, math, and science" (p. 203) There must be a strong relationship between staff and parents and informing parents must be in a way that respects their beliefs, while fostering what giftedness means, what opportunities are available and how those might support their child (Siegle et al., 2016). To overcome the deficit thinking that blocks access to Black gifted students, a strength-based approach is needed to find and serve students with gifts and talents (Renzulli and Reis, 2014). This must include teacher training and continuing professional development, as well as strong, effective communication to families and communities about the positive impact of gifted programming on the overall education of Black students.

As mentioned in previous SNAPshots, The Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act (2004; 2009) places a duty on authorities to "develop the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential". In an every-growing environment of ethnic diversity, it is important that communities and schools work together to recognise and help develop abilities in minority children.

Scotland's National Framework for Inclusion is posited on the values and beliefs of Social Justice, Inclusion, and Learning and Teaching Issues (Barrett et al., 2015). The framework is based on the General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS's) professional standards (GTCS, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Among other commitments, it articulates the values of

 *Committing to the principles of democracy and social justice through fair, transparent, inclusive and sustainable practices*

 *Respecting the rights of all learners as outlined in the UNCRC*

There are highly able learners in every school. An equity lens must be used to ensure that all highly able learners are identified and provided with appropriate instruction.

Guidelines from the US National Association of Gifted Children

The following guidelines were edited and taken from the US National Association of Gifted Children: "A Culturally Responsive Equity-Based Bill of Rights for Gifted Students of Color" (Ford et al., 2018). While they do address gifted education in America, many can be adapted for an inclusion-based school.

Regardless of their origin, Ethnic Minority Highly Able Students Need:

- ★ *Culturally relevant curriculum and instruction (see SNAPshot on Culturally Responsive Practice)*
- ★ *Culturally Responsive Practice)*
- ★ *Authentic and multicultural content in all content areas*
- ★ *Rigorous multicultural curriculum and materials that reflect their cultural, racial, and linguistic background and heritage*
- ★ *Rigorous and authentic multicultural literature reflective of all cultures*
- ★ *Curricula that promotes cultural, racial, and linguistic pride*
- ★ *Their views to be encouraged and honoured rather than silenced*
- ★ *Curricula that will prepare them to be globally competitive and knowledgeable of world cultures*

Recommendations

- ★ *Annual equity goals and objectives for district, regional, and national programs*
- ★ *Teachers must engage in continuous and systematic professional learning experiences in cultural competency and multicultural education*
- ★ *A program philosophy/mission/belief statement that explicitly addresses the needs of highly able students of colour*

Suggestions for Identification

- ★ *Evaluate and identify using multiple criteria*
- ★ *Evaluate in multimodal and multi-dimensional ways*
- ★ *Assess with non-biased tests and instruments for screening and identification*
- ★ *Assess with non-verbal tests for screening and identification*
- ★ *Evaluate by bilingual test examiners (e.g., school psychologists)*
- ★ *Assess by tests and instruments in their predominant or preferred language*
- ★ *Assess by tests and instruments translated into their primary or preferred language*
- ★ *Assess with culturally normed checklists*
- ★ *Evaluate with tools re-normed to represent their cultural experiences and realities*
- ★ *Evaluate by tests and instruments normed on students of colour for screening and identification*

References

Casey, Ronald, Carole P. Smith, and Valsa Koshy. "Opportunities and Challenges of Working with Gifted and Talented Students in an Urban Context: A University-Based Intervention Program." *Gifted Child Today*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2011, pp. 35-43.

Cline, S., Schwartz, D. (1999). *Diverse populations of gifted children*. Upper-Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Duncan, Pamela and Matty Edwards (2017) *Huge effect of ethnicity on life chances revealed in official UK figures*. The Guardian. 10 Oct 2017. www.guardian.com. Accessed 7 June 2018.

Ford, D.Y., Kenneth T. Dickson, Joy Lawson Davis, Michelle Trotman Scott, and Tarek C. Grantham (2018) *A Culturally Responsive Equity-Based Bill of Rights for Gifted Students of Color*. National Association of Gifted Children. www.NAGC.org

Gentry, M., Hu, S., & Thomas, A. T. (2008). Ethnically diverse students. In J. A. Plucker & C.M. Callahan (Eds.), *Critical issues and practices in gifted education* (pp. 195–212). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Gould, S. J. (1995). *The Mismeasure of Man* (revised ed.) New York: Norton.

Hek, Rachel. "Integration Not Segregation: Young Refugees in British Schools." *Forced Migration Review*, no. 15, 2002, pp. 31-32.

Institute of Race Relations (2018) *Ethnicity and religion statistics*. www.irr.org.uk

Magro, Karen (2009) *Expanding Conceptions of Intelligence: Lessons Learned from Refugees and Newcomers to Canada*, *Gifted and Talented International*, 24:1, 79-92, DOI: 10.1080/15332276.2009.11674863

Mitchell, Joanna (2015) *Supporting Syrian refugee children who arrive in your school*. SecEd. www.Sec-Ed.co.uk 04 November 2015. Accessed 7 June 2018.

Perry, B.D. (2002) 'Childhood Experience and the Expression of Genetic Potential: What Childhood Neglect Tells Us About Nature and Nurture' , *Brain and Mind* 3(1): 79-100.

Renzulli, J. S., & Reis, S. M. (2014). *The Schoolwide Enrichment Model: A how-to guide for talent development* (3rd ed.). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Siegle, Del, et al. "Barriers to Underserved Students' Participation in Gifted Programs and Possible Solutions." *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 103-131.

UK.gov (2017) Race Disparity Audit. Cabinet Office

UK.gov (2018) Population and Migration. Office of National Statistics.

Ukpokodu, Omiunota N. "African Immigrants, the "New Model Minority": Examining the Reality in U.S. k-12 Schools." *The Urban Review*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2018, pp. 69-96.

United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) 2015. Figures at a glance. www.UNHCR.org. Accessed 7 June 2018.

Valencia, Richard R. *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice*. Falmer Press, London, 1997.