Curriculum Approaches that Build Learning Bridges for Diverse Gifted Students

Beth Hahn, Karen Qualls, Tracy Alley, Aimee Fletcher, Kim Gordon, & Todd Stanley
University of Cincinnati

The authors are faculty and adjunct faculty members for the University of Cincinnati Gifted Endorsement Program.

One of the most important considerations in teaching gifted students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) is to hold high expectations for their learning and progress. Students can be supported in attaining these high expectations when teachers view student abilities through a strengths-based lens, seeing new language skills and different knowledge as *assets* rather than deficits when planning instruction. Teachers can be empowered to make necessary changes in curriculum to develop the strengths of diverse students, viewing themselves as "capable of bringing about change" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). One way of building this sense of empowerment for change is to increase awareness of how culture plays a role in day-to-day teaching. Teachers should ask themselves what they know about diverse gifted students in relation to the content area being studied. How do their own beliefs, values, assumptions and culture influence their thinking about diverse students? How do they collaborate with professional peers and advocate for gifted students? In this article, we provide a number of ideas for providing a rigorous curriculum for diverse students through collaborating, utilizing high quality instructional materials, and dif-

ferentiating instruction through higher order thinking processes. Overall, these components are supported by teachers who have high expectations and who are aware of the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Shifting from a deficit mindset that focuses on areas of remediation to a strengths-based mindset often includes retooling for teachers. Learning how to effectively communicate, self-reflect, and collaborate with other educators and parents is critical to providing a rigorous curriculum to students who have different backgrounds. The knowledge base of teachers should include cultural characteristics, linguistic differences, socioeconomic differences, and family/environmental considerations. Also, professional learning regarding modifications, motivation, strategies, services, technology, and outside resources should be considered as a means to implement best practices.

Collaborative Planning Models

Collaborative planning is a key component in developing appropriate supports for CLD gifted students. Siegle et al. (2016) identify Response to Intervention (RTI) as an effective model for CLD students because it provides scaffolded support through increasing levels of difficulty that allow for enrichment

or acceleration. Collectively, the school RTI team is able to provide bridges to new learning, along with suggestions for modifications and supports for CLD students. Although RTI is typically considered for students who are performing poorly, the use of an RTI process called "Uppervention" for gifted students can challenge and provide opportunities for gifted students to explore their talents (Work, 2014).

Another approach to providing support for CLD students is the use of the integrated classroom model. Mun and others (2016) suggested this approach because it includes differentiation and cluster grouping that can be used to build on student background knowledge and allow for student engagement. This model is best implemented using a team approach and student pre-assessment. Effective differentiation, however, can be complex. General education teachers may need support to appropriately modify their curriculum or use grouping to differentiate. Therefore, the support of a gifted educational specialist or ELL specialist via professional development, co-planning, co-teaching, or direct collaboration is critical.

Differentiation and Instructional Supports

Differentiation is important for gifted

students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Adapting the general curriculum to meet the unique needs of gifted CLD students begins with building on students' background knowledge (Van Tassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2006). This may include providing high quality materials in a student's native language, and/or literature about diverse cultures. It is important that interventions are matched to the student's area of strength, whether it is verbal or quantitative, or in critical thinking and reasoning. Honoring students' authentic work is a vital part of engaging CLD students in the learning process. Using illustrations, graphics, drama, manipulatives, and written expression in a student's primary language are excellent ways of encouraging and gauging student learning. Also, differentiating through questioning, open-ended activities or problem-based learning, as well as choosing appropriate challenging materials, allows for meaningful learning to occur for CLD students.

To attune instruction to student strengths, teachers can administer an interest inventory or survey in the beginning of the school year. The inventory/survey can target interests that will help the teacher plan lessons and understand the needs of each student. If a teacher discovers that a student enjoys playing the guitar at home, the teacher could incorporate a sharing time in class or incorporate a performing arts assignment on a choice board. Voice and choice are key elements in a differentiated classroom. Also, adapting learning tools so that they are reflective of CLD students is often a necessity to achieve appropriate differentiation. Many gifted teachers use choice boards as a way to challenge their students, and give them academic choices, but, choice boards need to be examined to make sure that they are culturally appropriate. If they are not, they need to be modified so that they are. Figure 1 displays an example of a typical choice board for *A Christmas Carol*.

These are seemingly creative activities that give students several choices. However, many of them are insensitive to CLD students, using choices that are reflective of settings of which they are not familiar. Additionally, these choices do not necessarily allow students opportunities to create products that are reflective of their culture or hold them to high expectations with sufficient rigor. There are ways to use *A Christmas Carol* even with its focus on Christmas without being culturally insensitive. A better choice board might look like the board in Figure 2.

In addition to choice boards and interest inventories, independent studies can be used as a way to link the passions of a student to the curriculum as a means to keep them engaged in the learning process. Independent studies allow students to share a passion that may not connect directly to the curriculum. For example, if the class studies the topic of simple machines, a student whose passion is sketching Italian cars might research Lamborghinis and reference all of the simple machines found in the cars through a sketch.

Additionally, Winebrenner and Brulles (2018) suggested that teachers of gifted students from diverse populations should learn about the cultural values of students before creating assignments. For example, some cultures value work completed in a "communal environment", while others value independent work. Being aware of cultural values will provide teachers with the opportunity to assure students that all modes will be implemented, but everyone will have a chance to work in their preferred mode.

Considerations should also be made for students learning a new language. Graphic organizers and verbal assignments can be used to reduce the amount of writing that linguistically diverse students have to complete during the language acquisition phase so that students get past barriers and truly demonstrate what they know. Such scaffolding supports can be gradually removed as students continue to gain language skills and content knowledge.

Supporting gifted students who are

Figure 1. Typical Example of Choice Board for *A Christmas Carol*

Change the setting of the story to that of the beach. Describe how the setting would change the story and why.	What role does tradition play in the story? Prepare a traditional holiday meal for the class and include the history of why this is an important food to your family.	Choose a passage and define 10 words you do not know, making a glossary with related illustrations so that it can be referenced by others.
Write a diary entry from the perspective of one of the minor characters. How might the minor character see what is going on in the book differently than others?	Student choice	Write a Christmas "carol" for the 21st century where you spread peace and good will.
Answer the following questions: 1. How does Scrooge change in the story? 2. What is the main problem and how is it resolved? 3. What is the theme?	Present a monologue from the perspective of one of the characters and how they view Ebenezer Scrooge.	Replace characters in the story with members of your family. How would your family members act in the story and would it change the storyline?

culturally and linguistically diverse also includes addressing their social-emotional needs as they pursue advanced academic content. As with other gifted students, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may deal with issues of perfectionism, underachievement, lack of motivation, or asynchronous behaviors. Therefore, digging beyond students' interests to tap into what motivates them or creates anxiety and triggers their frustra-tion is critical. Additionally, as teachers develop plans for rigorous instruction, they can co-create a navigation guide with the student using S.M.A.R.T. goals (S-Specific, M-Measurable, A-Attainable, R-Realistic, T-Timely). As students progress to achieve self-selected academic learning goals, they develop a sense of accomplishment and confidence. Achieving attainable goals allows students to develop self-regulation skills, motivation, and self-efficacy, all important psychosocial factors that facilitate talent development.

Through building background knowledge, tuning in to student interests, planning culturally-responsive instruction, providing a gradual release of scaffolded supports, and addressing social-emotional needs, we can pave paths for students to demonstrate their strengths and progress in their learning. As educators, we must reflect on the extent to which we teach with high

Figure 2. Choice Board with Culturally Responsive Considerations

Change the setting of the story. Describe how this setting would change the story and why. *This does not limit students to writing inauthentically about a beach for this story. Students can change the setting to a familiar setting.*	What do you think about the traditions that are used in the story? What role do they play in the development of the story? Why do you think traditions are important and what traditions are important to you? Share your ideas with the class in a creative way (food, collage, piece of art). *Students can consider other familiar traditions. This is also more culturally sensitive since some cultures do not celebrate holidays or a student may not be residing with their biological family.*	Choose a passage and define 10 words you think are important to the story. Also, provide a symbol for its meaning and importance in the story. *This provides an additional layer of abstract thinking, holding students to higher expectations of rigorous instruction, beyond defining words.*
Write a diary entry or draw a picture of a scene from the perspective of one of the minor characters. How might the minor character see what is going on in the book differently than others? *The additional choice provides an option for students to demonstrate their knowledge in other ways.*	Student choice	Reflect on the development of the theme of peace and goodwill within the story. Write a song for the 21st century where you spread peace and good will. You are not required to perform the song. *By the task not being limited to writing a Christmas "carol", students are given the opportunity to write a song using a music genre of their choice.*

With a partner, answer the following questions:
  1. What motivates Scrooge? How does this change throughout the story?
  2. How does the Scrooge's internal conflict help us understand the theme?
  3. How does the author use symbolism?
 	
This allows students to collaboratively discuss their responses, enhancing oral fluency and academic language, while also receiving peer support if needed. Questions are also more challenging, holding students to higher expectations.
	Present a monologue to the class or make a WeVideo of the monologue from the perspective of one of the characters and how they view Ebenezer Scrooge.
	
	This allows students an additional choice in filming the monologue. In consideration of oral fluency proficiency (for linguistically diverse students), this task allows practice and re-take opportunities for students who do not wish to perform directly in front of an audience.
		Replace characters in the story with members of a popular TV show or movie. How would these characters act in the story and would it change the storyline?
		
		Students have expanded opportunities to replace characters with familiar contexts. This is important for students who may not wish to discuss family members as indicated in the previous task.

expectations, engage in collaborative practices to benefit diverse learners, and thoughtfully plan culturally-responsive instruction. Such practices are promising in supporting diverse students as they aim to reach their greatest potential. **THP**

Resources

Lewis, L.C., Rivera, A., & Roby, D. (2012). *Identifying and serving culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students*. Prufrock Press, Inc.

Stanley, T (2011). *Project-based learning for gifted students: A Handbook for the 21st-Century Classroom*. Prufrock Press.

References

Mun, R. U., Langley, S. D., Ware, S., Gubbins, E. J., Siegle, D., Callahan, C. M., & Hamilton, R. (2016, December). *Effective practices for identifying and serving English learners in gifted education: A systematic review of literature*. Retrieved November 29, 2019, from https://ncrge.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/982/2016/01/NCRGE_EL_Lit-Review.pdf

Siegle, D., Gubbins, E. J., O'Rourke, P., Langley, S. D., Mun, R. U, Luria, S.R., & Plucker, J. A., (2016). Barriers to under served students' participation in gifted programs and possible solutions. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 39*, 103-131.

Van Tassel-Baska, J. & Stambaugh, T. (2006). *Comprehensive curriculum for gifted learners*. Pearson.

Villegas, A.M. & Lucas, T. (2002). *Preparing culturally responsive teachers: Rethinking the curriculum*. Newbury Park, California: *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*(1).

Winebrenner, S. & Brulles, D. (2018) *Teaching gifted kids in today's classroom*. Free Spirit Publishing.

Work, J. (2014, May). *Uppervention: Meeting the needs of gifted and talented students*. Retrieved from www.edutopia.org/blog/uppervention-for-gifted-talented-students-josh-work