Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Students with Giftedness

How Teachers & Parents Can Support Their Academic & Social Needs

Huong Tran Nguyen

Introduction

Quynh (pseudonym), a Vietnamese-American female, was an honor student in her K-12 education in Vietnam four decades ago. April 30, 1975, abruptly signaled the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War. Many military personnel from the former regime found themselves and their loved ones in danger of being persecuted by the victorious new government. Nearly a decade later, Quynh and her family were permitted to enter the United States as political asylees; Southern California became their adopted home. There she resumed her education and pursued teaching as a career.

Quynh soon completed her undergraduate and post-baccalaureate college education in the U.S. In addition to becoming a teacher, Quynh was also raising a school-aged daughter, Sheryl (pseudonym). Quynh's acculturation to her new life in the U.S. and its cultural values and norms was not without challenges. One of Quynh's new learnings pertained to understanding what giftedness is and how schools identify, measure, assess, and then place students in appropriate gifted education programs. This information was important to her so that she would be able to fully support her daughter's academic and social needs.

Quynh often felt perplexed by her daughter's multi-tasking activities and observed that Sheryl seemed totally oblivious to her environment. A *Harry Potter* book in her lap with earphones plugged to her head, she text messaged to her friends, watched her favorite television program, and word processed her school assignments on her home computer, all simultaneously.

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Friends and acquaintances have often told Quynh, "Don't worry. That's typical teenager behavior! She'll grow out of it." It has been several years; Sheryl has not "grown out of it." What was Quynh to do? Like others, Quynh believed that parents are their child's first and most influential teacher, especially during their formative years. She tried to support her daughter's talents by fulfilling her responsibility as an informed parent, as explained by Smutny, Veenker, and Veenker (1989).

> The best hope a gifted child has is for an informed parent to pave the way, prepare his expectations, enrich his surroundings, bridge gaps, open doors, leap obstacles, build confidence, and produce change where it is needed. Parents are, after all, the first and most important teachers a child has, and, in the years before the identification process even begins in school, they are particularly significant. (Introduction, IX)

Presumably, a parent possesses intimate knowledge about her child that others may not. From Quynh's perspective, being a parent is one of the most challenging jobs in the world. She struggled with understanding her child's complex thought processes, viewpoints on matters, and responses to internal and external stimuli. Though Quynh repeatedly tried to connect to her daughter, she felt as though her efforts were frequently in vain: they seemed to be living in separate worlds.

This article is a narrative of Quynh's journey toward better understanding aspects of giftedness in Sheryl and how it became manifested in cross-cultural contexts in order to fully support her daughter's academic and social needs. The purpose of this article is to:

1. Shed light on the experience of a Vietnamese American parent of a child with giftedness which could be of value to other parents;

2. Emphasize the importance of teachers and parents working together to ensure positive learning experiences for students with giftedness from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; and

3. Offer practical suggestions and recommendations for educators to implement in their school settings.

Background

To provide a social and historical context for this article, I cite findings from the seminal work of researchers (some of whom appeared in the literature decades ago) in the fields of gifted education, language and culture, and the adaptation process and identity development of Vietnamese Americans in the U.S. I first address the culturally-defined conceptions of giftedness by which schools have traditionally used to determine giftedness in students. Next is a discussion of a Vietnamese-American parent's perspective (informed by her cultural and familial socialization processes) of raising a daughter with giftedness. Finally, I offer recommendations based on current evidence-based practice in the professional literature for how teachers and parents can work together to support the educational success of students with exceptionalities.

Conceptions and Measures of Giftedness

What does giftedness/talent mean? Many years ago Terman (1926), for example, defined giftedness as those at the top 1% level in general intellectual ability as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (Binet & Simon, 1905, as cited in Sternberg, 2007). The Stanford-Binet and the Wechsler Scales of Intelligence have been used to measure general intellectual abilities, 132-145 points being the gifted range (98th percentile) and 145 or above (99th percentile) as highly gifted (Klein, 2007). Hence, this restrictive and

narrow criterion has excluded persons whose talent/skill might be found in other domains (Renzulli, 2002).

In presenting his report to the U.S. Congress in 1972, former U. S. Commissioner of Education Sidney P. Marland, Jr. recommended a general definition of giftedness and urged districts to adopt it (Alvino, 1985). The report also added high functioning talents and skills—either singly or in combination—that might not necessarily have been measured by an intelligence test. These skills are: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability (Alvino, 1985; Renzulli, 2002; Sternberg, 2007).

The Marland report continues to be used by most school districts and states and generally serves as the basis for defining giftedness. Some states, however, have adopted no definition of giftedness at all (Alvino, 1985). Though there is no single agreed-upon definition and identification of giftedness/talent among researchers and educators, they generally agree that these individuals are "highly intelligent," based on a common set of characteristics (Renzulli, 2002; Sternberg, 2007), such as the one proposed by Marland.

Using such a broad definition of giftedness, a school system can expect to identify 10% to 15% or more of its student population as gifted and talented. In practice, however, almost all states rely on test scores—IQ and aptitude—to identify students for placement in special programs. Ironically, the Stanford-Binet IQ test, which reflects the French (and European) conception of competence, is no longer used today as a measure of giftedness for educational purposes in most nations, including France (Sternberg, 2007).

Gardner (1999) formulated a broader view of intelligence to include multiple intelligences, namely: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, spiritual, existential, and moral. De-emphasizing IQ, Renzulli (2002) has defined gifted *behaviors* rather than gifted individuals. He conceptualized such behaviors as an interaction between three basic interlocking clusters of human traits—above-average ability, high-levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Renzulli's definition supports Marland's (1972) and recognizes a wider range of performance areas which may not necessarily be identified or measured by conventional cognitive ability tests.

Dimensions of Giftedness/Talent in Cross-Cultural Contexts

The notion of giftedness/talent does not exist in a vacuum. It is a social and cultural construct which reflects the culture(s) of those who conceptualize it (e.g., the French Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale) and the cultural context (e.g., France/Europe in the 1900s) in which relevant gifted behaviors were observed (Sternberg, 2007). In other words, dimensions of "intelligence" are culturally defined. For instance, Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) found that Asian Americans tended to emphasize *cognitive* competence whereas Latino Americans emphasize *socio-emotional* competence.

These researchers stated that school systems with Asian-American and Latino-American students, for instance, should take into account their respective familial and community socialization processes and conceptions of intelligence in determining these students' competencies for programmatic and curricular purposes. Moreover, teachers need to understand that all persons are products of their culture, hence are cultural beings, because culture plays a powerful, cross-generational, and inevitable role in all domains of human existence, including educational institutions (Erickson, 2007).

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Culture and Cultural Diversity

What is *culture*? This seven-letter word is an abstract notion often debated among researchers and theorists. Indeed, Erickson stated that "[a]ttempts at formal definitions of culture have not been fruitful; even the experts have not been able to agree on what culture *really* is" (emphasis in original, p. 35). For the purpose of discussion in this article, I use the definition proposed by Milner and Ford (2007), which builds upon the work of other theorists (Ford, 1996; Hale, 2001; Irvine & York, 1995). Milner and Ford conceptualized culture as "the characteristics of a person that are developed through formal and informal experiences, knowledge, disposition, skills, and ways of knowing and understanding that are informed by race, ethnicity, identity, class, sexuality, and gender" (p. 168).

The linguistic and cultural mosaic of the United States has changed over time. For example, California public schools today serve nearly 1.6 million students whose heritage language is not English; these students are considered English language learners (ELLs). This number makes up 33% of the entire K-12 public school population in the state (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2005), but the teacher force does not reflect the student demographics. Eighty-five percent of these students speak Spanish, 2.2% Vietnamese, followed by less than 2% of Hmong, Cantonese, Tagalog (Filipino), Korean, Khmer (Cambodian), Armenian, Mandarin, and Punjabi, respectively (California Department of Education, Educational Demographics, 2010-2011).

To meet this challenge, school personnel working with culturally and linguistically diverse students and families need to reflect upon their own culture and that of others to develop cultural competence (Milner & Ford, 2007), and refrain from regarding their dominant culture as representative of the only correct and superior viewpoint (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009). An inability to view other cultures as equally viable for organizing reality is a manifestation of "ethnocentrism," which prevents a person from looking "through other cultural lenses, individuals, and cultures" (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009, p. 19) and can lead to misunderstanding, "mental anguish, verbal conflict, and physical harm" (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009, p. 119).

In a pluralistic society such as the U.S., multicultural understanding is crucial to achieving an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 2010). It is, therefore, essential that teachers (especially in the elementary grades) get to know their students, and their ways of experiencing the world in order to establish a "caring and supportive teacher-student relationship… important in creating an effective psychological classroom climate critical to long-term academic success" (Ormod, 2010, p. 506).

Elementary teachers play a significant role in the decision-making process of identifying special talents in their students and ensuring that they receive gifted education services. If not, these students will miss opportunities for gifted, advanced, and ac-

celerated classes in middle and high school, which will then fail to prepare them for entry into the best institutions of higher education (Milner & Ford, 2007).

By collaborating with parents, teachers will better be able to accurately identify and assess talents in their students and make informed curricular and programmatic decisions to support these students' unique academic and social needs (Klein, 2007; Milner & Ford, 2007). When schools, families, and communities develop strong partnerships, students benefit from such collaboration. In the spirit of partnership, Taylor & Whittaker (2009) have suggested that families

> …be allowed to request assistance, rather than having it forced on them. Some may find community agencies and institutions intimidating and may need advocates to accompany them; others will be inhibited due to previous negative experiences with mainstream personnel. (p. 61)

Identification of Giftedness

Giftedness is a socially constructed notion that is perceived, interpreted, and used in differing ways by people from various cultures to determine a person's gift or talent (Sternberg, 2007). In the realm of education, parents and teachers must account for how they interpret the meaning and measures of giftedness, and how they perceive these learners' thoughts, actions, attitudes, and behaviors in multiple contexts (Sternberg, 2007).

In the late 1960s, minority students were seldom represented in programs for the gifted. Yet, the proportion of minority students placed in classes for the mentally disabled has far exceeded that of students receiving gifted education services (Baldwin, 2002), including non-native-English-speaking students (Artiles & Klingner, 2006; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). This inequitable trend has continued and must be reversed. The process of identifying, recruiting, and retaining such students should be reformed (Sternberg, 2007; Milner & Ford, 2007), and new paradigms for designing organizational and instructional methods and strategies must be adopted (Baldwin, 2002).

Understanding students' cultures helps teachers find ways to capitalize on the resources, traits, personalities, and experiences these students bring to the learning environment. Educators and parents need to expand their knowledge of giftedness, develop cultural competence, and work as partners to support all students (Banks & Banks, 2010; Gollnick & Chinn, 2009; Milner & Ford, 2007).

Identity Development of the Vietnamese

Given that "every person and social group possesses and uses culture as a tool for the conduct of human activity" (Erickson, 2007, p. 34), a person's individual identity is tied to that of her group. Quynh and her family share an important national/cultural identity and a sense of belonging identity with their Vietnamese compatriots (Phan, L. H., 2007, 2008; Phan, N., 1998; Tran, V., 2000).

When the Vietnam War ended on April 30, 1975, the Vietnamese fled en masse to many destinations worldwide (Caplan, Whitmore, & Choy, 1989; Freeman, 1992, 1995; Haines, 1989). The U.S. government granted many Vietnamese refugees entry through a humanitarian act (Nguyen M. H., & Haines, 1996; Rutledge, 1992). Quynh's father had been a former military officer and prisoner of war so her family qualified under this act.

Overnight, the Vietnamese went from being citizens of Vietnam to becoming refugees, immigrants, Asian Americans, and a racial minority around the world (Haines, 1996). Having survived a historically tortured past, it is recognized that the Vietnamese developed resilience, a survival instinct, and core collective root identity, connectedness, and pride (Caplan et. al, 1989, 1991; Kibria, 1993; Rutledge, 1992).

In essence, the Vietnamese's construction of their cultural identity is related to their ethnicity, language, and group, all of which inform their perception of self, others, and social milieu (Caplan et al., 1991; Freeman, 1995; Kibria, 1993). Rutledge explained:

> Vietnamese-Americans have a chosen a course which cannot be definitely be described as either acculturation or assimilation…This model of "cultural integrity and adaptation" weaves together selected elements of the American culture necessary for survival, achievement, and future success, while preserving traditional values and belief systems underscoring an intense and proud ethnic heritage. (pp. 146-147)

Like others, Quynh and her family share a desire to hold on to their traditional values, having been uprooted from their past and ushered into rebuilding a new identity (Freeman, 1995; Kibria, 1993; Phan, L. H., 2008). One of these values relates to a deep respect for teachers as second parents (Nguyen, 2008). Vietnamese education and society has been heavily influenced by Confucianism as a result of China's 1,000-year occupation from approximately 111 BC to AD 938 (Phan, L. H., 2008). Chinese culture reveres educators and values education. Education brings social recognition and material rewards, even for people of obscure origin or modest means (Hu, 2002). L. H. Phan (2008) elaborated on this Confucian-based respect as follows:

> Being a teacher in Vietnam involves demonstrating morality in every way. Teachers are expected to be moral guides, and Vietnamese society and culture expect that they themselves will lead a morally acceptable life …[and] also offe[r] teachers a very high and noble status in society. Evidence of this significant role of morality can be found in Vietnamese history and folklore and in empirical studies related to education in Vietnam. (p. 6)

Another value Quynh and relatives cherish is the Confucian-influenced principles of filial piety and collectivism. These principles encompass respect for elders, younger siblings obeying older siblings, and the eldest male sibling assuming authority in the absence or death of their parents. Moreover, all siblings are expected to place family priorities above their own, protect the family's name, be willing to make sacrifices for one another, and provide for their aging parents.

Family harmony is stressed and interdependence (not independence), is modeled and reinforced by adults (Rutledge, 1992). Children learn the importance of hierarchy—not equality—and are rewarded for submission to those of senior status or in higher position rather than for becoming assertive (Freeman, 1995). These principles do not cease when the children enter into adulthood and have families of their own (Rutledge, 1992).

Cross-Generational Coping Mechanisms

As first-generation immigrants, Quynh and her husband had been raised with the above principles. Not surprisingly, they struggled with raising their second-generation American-born daughter in a nation which values, among other things, independence and individual freedom. On one hand, the couple had to balance between honoring and nurturing Sheryl's individuality. On the other, they had to account for their respective familial and community socialization processes and uphold their cherished traditions and values.

They measured their individual triumphs by their family's collective success because their individual identity was largely a function of their membership in their primary ethnic group (Rutledge; 1992; Freeman, 1995; Phan, L. H., 2008). They believed that children should be re-

spectful to elders and are not considered equal conversational partners to adults, hence, not permitted to participate in adult discourse (Nguyen, D. H., 1972). This couple's conception of intelligence also influenced how they perceived their daughter's manifested gifted behaviors in varying contexts (Milner & Ford, 2007).

For instance, Sheryl was encouraged to express her views, be independent, follow her dreams, and even disagree with her teachers (more or less) at school. At home, however, Sheryl was expected to abide by her family's values of interdependence, obedience, reverential respect, and modesty. Sheryl was also taught that her family's priorities, needs, and wishes should take precedence over her own. Yet she yearned to be herself, to value individualism, independence, self-reliance, and personal freedom (Klein, 2007).

Both mother and daughter felt conflicted by these incongruent sets of values. As a parent, the responsibility weighed more on Quynh who had to be the peacekeeper between her husband and their daughter in ascertaining how much freedom to grant their child. This tension is an example of how Quynh responded to adaptation challenges as an immigrant living in multiple worlds (Kibria, 1993; Taylor & Whittaker, 2009).

Attending multi-generational family events was another source of tension for Quynh and her daughter. Family members, friends, and acquaintances often remarked that Sheryl was a "bookworm," lacked social skills, and appeared "spoiled." Quynh lamented that she felt scrutinized for her parenting skill, and was perceived as not having full control of her child.

It was particularly difficult for Quynh to help her own parents understand that she could not expect her child to obey a strict set of rules and follow rigid structure at all times. For instance, Quynh's parents expected her to teach Sheryl to greet and bow to adults upon meeting them, never going up to adults to talk unless approached first, never interrupting or interfering adults' conversations, and valuing education and making it a life priority.

Quynh was constantly subjected to intense criticism by her parents and siblings for "losing" her "Americanized" child to a "foreign" culture (that her parents did not fully comprehend) even though Sheryl was American-born and living in the U.S. To cope with this constant barrage of criticisms, Quynh turned to the California Association for the Gifted (CAG) to learn more about giftedness and behavioral characteristics of children with exceptionalities.

This involvement in CAG contributed to her being invited as a parent guest speaker, and later, a workshop presenter at locally-held conferences. One of these events was held for the first time in an ethnic enclave; it drew a sizable number of Vietnamese-speaking parents of children (ages 3 to 18) with exceptionalities. Quynh decided to bring her parents and daughter to these CAG activities. She was determined to introduce her parents to these activities to help them become more understanding of Sheryl's talents and accepting of her parenting skill.

In this forum, Quynh, her parents, and her daughter had a chance to interact with individuals with exceptionalities and their loved ones who were equally interested in finding ways to better understanding and supporting their children and grandchildren with special talents.

Development of a Bicultural Child with Giftedness

Sheryl had no trouble keeping busy, often isolating herself from others and appearing oblivious to her environment. She was content with climbing trees, leaving toys or objects around the house, and drawing and painting at all times and on any surface. She craved knowledge and found refuge in books and other reading material (manuals, pamphlets, advertisements). She questioned data and facts, and persistently posed "what if" and "why" questions, some of which her mother and teachers could not answer.

According to Quynh, Sheryl had excellent concentration skills (e.g., multi-tasking activities, filtering out distractions in surroundings), but was not organized and neat. However, Sheryl did set high standards for herself and would not give up until she felt she has made every attempt to tackle a problem. In fact, her drive would at times encroach upon her family activities. When asked to refrain from what she was doing, Sheryl often lingered and ignored her mother's request.

Quynh interpreted this reluctance to be "testy" and stubborn. The more Quynh insisted on her daughter following orders, the more Sheryl resisted. Ultimately, Quynh had to compromise with her daughter to keep a sense of harmony in their home. Quynh often had difficulty accepting Sheryl's strong will and embracing the reality of her gifted potential (Klein, 2007).

Quynh has always thought that a gifted person was someone able to give undivided attention to a task at hand, completing it fully and successfully before embarking upon another. Hence, she found Sheryl's multi-tasking behavior perplexing and reprimanded her daughter for being unfocused and easily distracted. Ironically, Sheryl's multi-tasking did not have an adverse affect on her studies. On the contrary, she had been receiving all "A" grades in her classes, countering her mother's argument that she needed to focus singly on a task in order to be considered successful.

Adoption of Supportive Strategies

Reflecting upon her communication style, Quynh realized that she needed to be more explicit in giving commands and making requests. Her cultural orientation represented patterns she had learned at an early age in her primary familial socialization. Her tendency toward indirectness also led to her avoidance of confrontation and disagreements. She assumed that Sheryl would be able to "read" her mind and infer from her indirect messages, such as affect, tone, body language, facial expressions (Milner & Ford, 2007).

A coping mechanism for Quynh was to honor some, but not all, of the Vietnamese values (upheld by her parents) in raising her daughter (i.e., discouraging her child from voicing her opinions, obligating her to bow to adults as a sign of respect, forbidding her from joining adults in conversation). Arriving at this decision gave her a sense of liberation and empowerment as if a heavy burden had been lifted off her shoulders; she characterized it as an "epiphany." This example illustrates the inner turmoil immigrants often experience in attempting to bridge multiple worlds in their process of acculturation or assimilation into U.S. society and cultural ways (Banks, 2010; Freeman, 1995; Gollnick & Chinn, 2009; Gordon, 1994; Olsen, 1997; Rutledge, 1992).

Armed with this newfound freedom, Quynh tried some of the strategies she had previously learned and grew to appreci-

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ate. She spent more family time with her daughter as individuals, not just as parent and child. Before entering Sheryl's room, she knocked on the door and waited for her daughter's invitation (an uncommon practice among first-generation Vietnamese American families). She refrained from checking her child's backpack, tidying up her child's bedroom, and discarding her child's personal items. She stayed involved in her child's life and offered to help with home/school projects.

This balanced approach lessened their feelings of isolation which slowly dissipated (Klein, 2007). Encouraged by this positive change, Quynh continued to openly discuss with Sheryl her daughter's thoughts and emotions while withholding judgment, expressed support for her daughter, and problem solved their daily challenges as a team, not as adversaries. From Quynh's perspective, it took time and effort to accomplish this goal, but the experience was immensely rewarding.

Advocacy for Sheryl

Quynh often took for granted that her daughter should be able to do well on their own and be well-behaved in school (Klein, 2007). Quynh also believed that Sheryl's individual needs and success should not take priority over her class' collective success since many of Sheryl's classmates have benefited from her help and that all members were interdependent upon one another. This culturally-framed perception kept her from actively listening to Sheryl's feelings about being unchallenged in regular education classes, with no differentiation made for her special skills.

Quynh recalled multiple instances when Sheryl described her typical day at school filling out meaningless and simple worksheet after worksheet, answering easy and irrelevant questions, and often being punished for getting out her seat or talking to classmates. As a public school teacher, Quynh felt compelled to come to other teachers' defense (albeit at the expense of her daughter's repeated cry for help), rationalizing that educators had too many students to attend to and numerous duties to fulfill (Lortie, 1975). Basically, Quynh told Sheryl to "take it" and learn to deal with it.

Quynh's hesitation to approach Sheryl's teachers and avoidance of potential confrontation and disagreements was another manifestation of her Confucian frame of reference (Hu, 2002; Phan, L. H., 2008). However, Quynh knew she had to find a solution to her daughter's growing boredom in school. Finally, she inquired about the testing process for identifying giftedness/talent in students only to be told that such a process would begin in third, not second grade. However, she later learned that the district of her employment and of her child's attendance did, indeed, administer this test to second graders.

Quynh therefore followed up with Sheryl's teachers regarding assessment and placement procedures in the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program. Sheryl was ultimately allowed to go to a higher grade level for part of the day, where she received a more appropriate education and discovered a whole new world ahead of her. She excelled in art, poetry, and writing, and participated in writing competitions, from 3rd to 7th grade. Her work was often selected with others' to represent her school for the district-wide contest.

Quynh realized that she needed to overcome her own reticence and paid Sheryl's teachers frequent visits to discuss Sheryl's overall development as a bilingual person with giftedness. Only then was she able to advocate for her daughter's rights to receive appropriate gifted education services. In retrospect, had she not pursued this avenue, her daughter would have missed opportunities for gifted and advanced classes in middle and high school, and would not be prepared for entry to the best institutions in higher education (Milner & Ford, 2007).

Discussion

Sheryl was frequently the first to have completed her assignment in class. She learned to sit silently and wait patiently for the rest of her classmates. Her silence was often presumed by her teachers to be typical of trouble-free Asian-American students, able to take care of themselves and needing no assistance. Such presumption likely poses a danger to these students' unmet needs (Tateishi, 2007-2008). For example, Sheryl was expected to "wait it out" and was given no further enrichment activities when she could have been reading literature or performing other tasks at her intellectual level. Such practice would not be considered an "equity pedagogy" (a dimension of multicultural education) because it failed to use a wide range of strategies and techniques in ways that facilitated the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, gender, and social class groups (Banks, 2010).

Another common practice observed in school is for students with giftedness like Sheryl to tutor less-able peers so that the teacher can tend to academically more needy students. Using cooperative learning as an instructional tool for reinforcing concepts or ideas presented by the teacher is one thing, delegating "teaching" responsibility to students with special talents is quite another. Evidently, a persistent myth held by the general public is that Asian Americans excel in mathematics (Chang & Au, 2007-2008). But is that the case for all? It came as a surprise to Sheryl's teachers that some of their Asian-American students found math to be challenging.

Since Sheryl excelled in just about every subject matter, including math, she became the "resident expert" and responsibility often fell on her shoulders when her peers were unable to problem solve or expressed math phobia. Instead of remaining in her regular education class to tutor others, Sheryl should have been placed in a more advanced math class to extend her knowledge, given that rigor of the curriculum is clearly associated with student achievement (Barton, 2004). This scenario illustrates a hidden or unofficial curriculum (just as important as the explicit or official curriculum) because students learn from non-verbal language and implicitly stated attitudes, beliefs, and values from adults about how the school and/or teachers view them and what they are capable of doing or not (Banks, 2010).

Rather than validating Sheryl's expressed boredom in school, Quynh was ambivalent about approaching her daughter's teachers. Even though she was also a teacher, her Vietnamese upbringing heavily influenced how she perceived the role her daughter's teachers played. That is, teachers should be revered because they symbolized the parent figure at school, knew best, represented an authority figure, and were experts in their field (Nguyen, 2008).

Reluctantly, Sheryl's regular education teachers at the elementary and middle schools from grades K-8 admitted that, without proper training, they were unsure of what learners with giftedness needed specifically or how to incorporate elements of novelty, complexity, and higher level thinking into their curriculum and instruction. Additionally, the demographic make-up of the teachers at these schools did not reflect that of the students. These K-8 teachers were mostly middle class, Caucasian, and have been teaching for at least a decade in a community that has become increasingly diverse over the years. Therefore, cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity and culturally responsive

pedagogy would have been professional development areas from which these teachers would have benefited.

From Quynh's perspective, raising Sheryl has been a challenge, but also a blessing. Quynh tried her best to stay balanced, be understanding, supportive, and passionate. By adjusting the way she envisioned her mother role, communication style, definition of gifted behaviors, and notion of collectivism, Quynh noticed gradual harmony in her relationship with her daughter and natural progression in Sheryl's overall development. Exposure to CAG activities, reading recent literature on the subject, joining a support group of mothers of children with giftedness, and sharing her story with others in professional settings have contributed to fertile opportunities for her, her parents, and her daughter to develop voice and a sense of empowerment.

Recommendations

Parents and teachers of gifted students need to become culturally competent, understand that all humans are cultural beings, and that dimensions of "intelligence" are culturally defined (Sternberg, 2007). Hence, the respective familial and community socialization processes of students (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009) with giftedness (Milner & Ford, 2007), their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), and conceptions of intelligence (Alvino, 1985; Binet & Simon, 1905; Klein, 2007; Renzulli, 2002; Sternberg, 2007; Terman, 1926) must be taken into account in determining their competencies and familial resources for programmatic and curricular purposes (Milner & Ford, 2007). Quynh's journey was illuminating in that she learned valuable lessons that she hoped would help others in supporting their child's overall development.

The following recommendations could be of use to parents of children with exceptionalities in advocating for their child's rights to receive appropriate services: (1) Enhance one's knowledge of giftedness; (2) Know the district policies and procedures for gifted education services; (3) Find out available gifted education services at the school of one's child's; (4) Request one's child to be assessed for potential giftedness; (5) Request that one's child be sent to a higher grade level for a more challenging curriculum in certain subjects if the school does not have a gifted program or a gifted class; or (6) Request that one's child skip a grade level or more (if socially mature and ready), upon consultation with appropriate school officials; or (7) Request that one's child be placed in a different school that does provide gifted education services, upon consultation with appropriate school officials; and (8) Petition to the district if options 5 to 7 fail.

The following suggestions are offered to educators for consideration in implementing better support for gifted students from diverse backgrounds in their own school settings. Many seasoned teachers who have been teaching in demographically diverse communities have little knowledge of the heritage backgrounds and cultural practices of the students under their tutelage.

Lunar New Year

For instance, many Vietnamese-American parents keep their children at home up to three days to celebrate the Vietnamese Lunar New Year (called "Tet"), which falls between late January and early February. This holiday is significant in that millions and millions of Vietnamese in and out of Vietnam observe it (California has the largest population of Vietnamese outside of Vietnam). Teachers can work with other bilingual colleagues, teacher assistants, and parents (also considered "cultural brokers") to design standards-based culturally responsive lessons (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Shor, 1992) that "filtered through students' cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master" (Gay, 2000, p. 24).

With the inception of technology and a plethora of multicultural literature (e.g., dozens of Cinderella story versions exist worldwide), teachers can take advantage of these rich opportunities to enhance their curricula. For the Vietnamese New Year, teachers can use a variety of games, make-and-take art projects (e.g., red envelope to insert fresh paper money given by adults to children), and fun activities (e.g., dragon dance).

I had the opportunity to observe Quynh teach a Lunar New Year lesson as part of a weeklong theme of new-year celebrations around the world. She had invited other teachers and their students to her class. Parents and community members were guest speakers who shared their familial customs and traditions: some brought homemade treats, a few told their favorite folk tales, and several taught children songs. These adults beamed with pride; unfortunately, it was the first time a teacher had ever reached out to them for their cultural knowledge. The Vietnamese-speaking students in Quynh's class and those in other classes were visibly happy; it was a part of their background which they had personal accounts to share. It was a lesson many remembered fondly.

Culturally Relevant Lesson Planning

Another culturally relevant teaching episode occurred when a teacher of a fourth/fifth-grade combination class used *How Many Days to America?* by Eve Bunting (1988), a children's picture book, as part of her immigration unit. It depicts the experience of an immigrant family from Cuba who escaped from their original country in a clandestine operation and endured insurmountable challenges to finally reach Florida in time for Thanksgiving.

Prior to reading this book, the teacher showed a video clip of Ellis Island, used primary sources and pictures to discuss early patterns of U.S. immigration and its legal ramifications. Many of the students from different Spanish-speaking countries in her class were able to identify with

Recommendations for Parents of Children with Gifted Exceptionalities

1. Enhance one's knowledge of giftedness;
2. Know the district policies and procedures for gifted education services;
3. Find out available gifted education services at the school of one's child's;
4. Request one's child to be assessed for potential giftedness;
5. Request that one's child be sent to a higher grade level for a more challenging curriculum in certain subjects if the school does not have a gifted program or a gifted class; or
6. Request that one's child skip a grade level or more (if socially mature and ready), upon consultation with appropriate school officials; or
7. Request that one's child be placed in a different school that does provide gifted education services, upon consultation with appropriate school officials; and
8. Petition to the district if options 5 to 7 fail.

this story and had much to contribute to the discussion. Her Vietnamese-speaking students whose parents and grandparents were former refugees were also able to offer a different perspective about their families' escape from the war.

This unit culminated in a final written report and oral presentation that was far more enriching than just simply reading the words in the picture book without providing a historical and social context of the U.S., a nation of immigrants. The above two examples illustrate how teachers can use curriculum content and teaching strategies to design culturally relevant lessons and activities to give voice to their students' backgrounds and experiences.

Collaboration with Parents

Educators and parents can also collaborate to support students of diverse backgrounds with gifted exceptionalities. During school events such as Back to School Night, Open House, and parent-teacher conferences, it is highly beneficial for schools to have qualified bilingual interpreters available to help facilitate teacher-parent communication when teachers work with families of English language learners, gifted or not.

Relying on children to be translators has often been a common practice, but should not be the preferred choice. Culturally competent translators can help teachers recognize cultural differences (child-rearing, discipline, noise and movement, greetings, behavioral expectations) among members of that community and appreciate their cultural practices. This assistance can minimize potential barriers to communication because

> [w]hen teachers are willing to collaborate with families to develop culturally appropriate and relevant programs that include mutually selected bicultural behaviors and cross-culturally criteria for measuring progress, the partnership is enhanced. (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009, p. 57)

Understanding Families

Many immigrant working parents hold more than two jobs to provide for their families. Those parents may find it difficult to attend a school-sponsored event, particularly when held during school hours. Though interested in their child's education, they may face serious obstacles to becoming involved (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009) if it is requires leaving work early or arriving to work late, thus resulting in a loss of wages.

Some parents feel that they demonstrate support from home by sending their children to school clean and ready to learn, providing school supplies when requested, and reminding them to complete schoolwork (though they themselves may not be literate in English and/or their heritage language). These parents often feel that they are doing everything possible to support their child's learning and teachers' hard work.

Some schools choose to hold school events in the late afternoon and/or early evening, which while it does not necessarily guarantee full attendance, it is a recognition of parents' busy lives. On such days, schools generally release students a little earlier to give teachers a chance to prepare their classrooms for these meetings.

McGee Banks (2010) has recommended that schools/teachers consider flexible conference times, allowing parents to bring their younger children along (when babysitting is not available or affordable), finding ways to communicate to custodial parents, and knowing the correct surname of parents. For example, Quynh's surname is different from her daughter's because many Vietnamese women continue to observe the tradition of keeping their family last name after marriage, but children adopt their father's.

Communications and Accessibility

In terms of correspondence, schools might consider sending letters, newsletters, or other documents home in different languages. In large school districts in California, for example, these documents are available for mass distribution. At the start of the school year, teachers can also send a short questionnaire home to parents to collect their "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) which constitute the family's knowledge, strengths, and talents (e.g., heritage language, any health issues, sports, interests/hobbies, favorite books/subjects) and any concerns they may have.

The above recommendations are by no means exhaustive, but they do offer educators with practical suggestions for implementing culturally-sensitive activities and procedures in their own settings. Student background information will help teachers build a resource inventory of what students know and can bring to the table (additive approach) rather than the traditional needs assessment (subtractive approach) of what students lack.

Final Thoughts

Nearly 1.6 million culturally and linguistically diverse students in California's public schools has precipitated a critical need for teachers and parents to collaborate to support the education of these students. Through such partnerships, teachers will become more cross-culturally competent in understanding their students' multi-dimensional needs, such as having to navigate between two sets of often incongruent home-school cultures and expectations.

Furthermore, teachers need to differentiate their curriculum to incorporate multiple perspectives, experiences, and contributions of all people to reflect a more responsive pedagogy. By infusing cultural and social perspectives of all students into their practice, teachers will enhance subject matter relevance and interest which will validate students' life experiences and familial values.

Elements of complexity, novelty, difficulty, and variety (not necessarily quantity) must also be present in teachers' delivery and course assignments to ensure that students with special talents will be appropriately challenged. Finally, school districts must consider providing teachers, support staff, and administrators with sustained and structured professional development (PD) activities.

Given that schools each represent a social system (Banks, 2010), PD activities should include five key dimensions of multicultural education: content integration; knowledge construction process; equity pedagogy; prejudice reduction; and empowering school culture and social structure (pp. 20-22). By so doing, teachers as adult learners will be afforded opportunities to exchange ideas, negotiate their newly-developed understanding, expand their knowledge and skills in various aspects and measures of giftedness, and heighten their level of multicultural awareness and sensitivity.

Such PD efforts will ultimately contribute to the academic and social success of students, and ensure that students' perspectives will be cultivated, voices heard, and identity affirmed. At this writing, Sheryl has graduated from high school with honors and distinction. She had been accepted by several Ivy League institutions, but has chosen New York University for her undergraduate studies in business administration.

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