

**In the
Eyes
of the
Beholder**

Critical Issues
for Diversity
in Gifted Education

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Realities in Desegregating Gifted Education

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Educators of gifted children may always disagree, and probably wisely so, on how to define giftedness and best serve their students. But, they are likely united in imagining themselves Sisyphus, doomed forever to push a huge stone up a high hill only to have it roll back again. They struggle to gain even a small fraction of the support available for other exceptionalities, with that small fraction being treated as a dispensable luxury during the next budget squeeze. They must continually justify why children who “can take care of themselves” need special opportunities and defend against the charge that it is undemocratic and elitist even to identify some children as intellectually superior (Benbow & Stanley, 1996; Gottfredson, 2003c).

Critics suggest that gifted education is most self-evidently undemocratic when they demand to know, “Why are diverse students underrepresented—consistently and grossly underrepresented—in gifted education programs?” (Ford, 2003, p. 506). The underrepresentation of certain non-Asian racial-ethnic minorities is, indeed, “[o]ne of the most pervasive concerns in the field” of gifted education (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 1998, p. 122). Its “palpable importance” stems, we are told, from “the loss of talent it incurs and the message of exclusion it sends” (Rizza & McIntosh, 2001, p. 402). Not surprisingly, the persistent underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics has generated calls for fundamentally reconceptualizing and restructuring gifted education so that it will “closely represent [a] community’s demographics” (Ford, p. 518).

Unequal Representation in Gifted Education: Why?

One possible explanation for the racial imbalance in gifted education is that the ways we define and identify giftedness are biased in favor of Whites and Asians. A second possible explanation is that giftedness is not, in fact, distributed equally across all demographic groups. The first, Discrimination Theory, is usually offered as the *only* possible explanation; the latter, Distribution Theory, is offered as the *predominant* cause of racial imbalance in programs for the gifted.

Discrimination Theory: Unequal Recognition of Gifts and Talents

The two most commonly voiced reasons for unequal representation follow the first line of thinking: specifically, that traditional methods of identifying gifted children are culturally biased and, more importantly, that traditional conceptions of giftedness are narrow and skewed toward certain cultures.

Culturally biased and insensitive methods for identifying gifted children and their needs. Schools generally use some indicator of intellectual ability or academic achievement to identify gifted children. Richert (2003) exemplifies a cadre of critics who condemn this practice in her assertion that such “[m]easures of academic achievement . . ., including teacher recommendations, grades, and especially standardized tests, have been amply demonstrated to have cultural biases” (pp. 150–151). Some of these critics suggest switching to nonverbal tests of intelligence, such as the Raven Progressive Matrices, which require no language or background knowledge (e.g., Ford, 1995a, p. 59). Some (Stormont, Stebbins, & Holliday, 2001, p. 419) also recommend rescoring standardized tests or supplementing them with more qualitative measures of giftedness in order to equalize the rate at which students of different racial-ethnic groups are classified as gifted.

Richert (2003), for instance, incorporated both strategies in her four-part APOGEE procedure for guaranteeing racial balance in a school’s gifted program: (1) use a wide variety of indicators, including tests of achievement, but also recommendations by teachers, parents, and the students themselves (e.g., using checklists of interests, social skills, emotional strengths, and the like); (2) classify all students into subgroups by race, gender, and economic advantage; (3) rank students within their own race-gender-economic group on each indicator (i.e., create separate norming tables for each subgroup); and (4) then pick those students “scoring among the top 25 percent of their demographic group on any test score or by teacher, parent, or self-nomination” (p. 151).

Students need not be performing well academically to be selected because, as Richert (2003) has argued, many poor and culturally diverse students are “under-achieving students who particularly need a gifted program to develop their unmanifested potential” (p. 149). Low achievement levels among Blacks and Hispanics would rise, she suggested, if we conceptualized poor academic achievement as educators’ failure to recognize and nourish giftedness, rather than as stu-

dents failing to possess it. Equity, therefore, requires more diverse, more sensitive means of finding those unrecognized “potentially gifted” students who “have yet to reveal their true capabilities” (Ford, 1995a, pp. 59–60). Moreover, to identify only a few percent of students as gifted—and, worse yet, as “highly gifted”—is, in Richert’s view, “elitist,” “polariz[ing],” and puts in jeopardy the entire enterprise of gifted education (p. 149). In short, if our tools for identifying giftedness do not produce racial balance, we should modify them until they do.

Racial balance that is attained by changing selection tools will soon be undone, however, unless steps are taken to prevent higher failure rates among the lower achieving minority students identified as gifted. Gifted educators are therefore urged to better accommodate the needs of the minority children in their programs. For instance, Ford (2003, pp. 514–515; see also Stormont et al., 2001, pp. 419–421) has stated that gifted education programs must help underachieving gifted minority students by (1) providing more supportive learning environments (e.g., cooperative, rather than competitive), enhancing academic engagement and self-efficacy, and providing remediation as needed (e.g., study skills, time management); (2) improving instruction (e.g., smaller classes, higher teacher expectations) to close the achievement gaps; (3) enhancing the multicultural competence of teachers so that they better recognize the talents and needs of minority children; (4) providing multicultural education to reaffirm personal and cultural worth; and (5) developing home-school partnerships. In other words, sensitivity to culture-specific strengths must be followed by equal sensitivity to culture-specific needs.

Culturally biased or insensitive definitions of giftedness. Giftedness has traditionally been conceived as *intellectual* giftedness, as an ability to learn and perform remarkably well in any of a variety of intellectual domains, especially the academic and artistic; hence, the longstanding reliance on standardized tests and teacher referrals to identify unusually high levels of intellectual aptitude or achievement. In view of the “persistent gap in the intelligence, aptitude, and achievement test scores of [different racial-ethnic groups],” however, Ford (2003, p. 511) has argued that we must, in the name of equity, cease relying so exclusively on such tests and on the unidimensional notion of giftedness they seem to reflect. “[O]ne type of test cannot possibly measure the many types of intelligences that exist” (Ford, p. 514). In fact, Richter (2003) believes that “[a]chievement and IQ tests tend to *screen out* the most creative students, and teachers often have biases against non-conforming students” (p. 152, emphasis added). Reflecting a broader trend in gifted education (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 1998), both Ford and Richert advocate a multidimensional view of giftedness and correspondingly multimodal ways of identifying it.

Popular multidimensionalist conceptions include Sternberg’s (1997) set of three “triarchic” intelligences (analytical, creative, and practical) and Gardner’s (1983) set of seven “multiple intelligences” (linguistic, visuospatial, logical-mathematical, musical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and bodily-kinesthetic). Emotional

intelligence, emotional expressiveness, wisdom, oral fluency, civic mindedness, spirituality, commitment to social connectedness, and much else have also been put forward as distinct forms of giftedness. In some discussions, just about any admirable trait or behavior, broad or narrow, whether exhibited inside or outside school, qualifies as giftedness as long as a relevant observer (teacher, parent, peer, self) considers it a personal strength.

Multidimensionalists present their broader conceptions as more democratic because they are more “inclusive” than the traditional intellectual one. “[P]rograms for exceptional students [must be] inclusive rather than exclusive” because

[r]ecognizing the potentials and talents of all children requires a broadened vision of giftedness that reflects the understanding that talent and creativity vary markedly among individuals of varying cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. (Ford, 1995a, p. 60; cf. Richert, 2003, pp. 149–150)

The multidimensionalists’ “egalitarian and pluralistic” conceptions of giftedness reinforce their admonition to use culture- and context-sensitive means for identifying diverse forms of talent, as well as their reluctance to set many (if any) *a priori* boundaries on what constitutes giftedness. Because giftedness, like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder, they would increase the number and variety of beholders. For instance, laypeople sharing the child’s everyday world (e.g., parents) might identify strengths that professionals typically would not recognize as potential gifts. Whereas some multidimensionalists are willing to specify a delimited set of gifts and talents, others are more radical in preferring not to set any boundaries.

Distribution Theory: Unequal Distribution of Gifts and Talents

Proponents of Discrimination Theory either assert or take for granted that giftedness is evenly distributed across all demographic groups. Groups may exhibit different forms of giftedness, but all in equal quantity. There would be no demographic imbalances in programs for the gifted, they believe, but for discrimination and inept identification of talent. Any suggestion to the contrary—that giftedness may not exist in equal measure in all race-gender-economic groups—is labeled “deficit thinking” and rejected as destructive or racist. For example, speaking of the “persistent and pervasive underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted education,” which “is likely to have devastating, long-lasting effects,” Ford (2003) stated that “We can attribute much of this difficulty to deficit thinking, which limits access and opportunity” (p. 518). The premise that groups differ on the average in general mental ability (intelligence) “is harmful and unsound, and has no place in educational settings” (Ford, p. 511). Thus, to question the assumption that groups exhibit giftedness in equal proportion is itself said to create or magnify underrepresentation.

But, is it true that giftedness is equally distributed across all demographic groups? And is it true that, but for the ill will, ineptitude, and cultural myopia of school personnel, there would be racial parity in gifted education?

IQ/achievement gaps are real and important. An essential claim of Discrimination Theory is that standardized tests of IQ and academic achievement are culturally biased. However, that claim was disproved decades ago, with ever more refined investigations only reconfirming the conclusion that the major norm-referenced tests measure cognitive ability without bias (i.e., equally well) among native-born, English-speaking Americans, including Blacks (Neisser et al., 1996). (In fact, professional testing standards prohibit the publication and use of biased tests.) One must always be careful to use appropriate, culture-reduced tests when assessing the cognitive abilities of recent immigrants and language minorities, but test bias is not a frequent problem when proper precautions are observed. The “persistent gap in intelligence, aptitude, and achievement tests scores” about which Ford has written (2003, p. 511) therefore reflects real differences in important cognitive skills and achievements (Neisser et al.).

Criterion-referenced achievement tests show the same real differences in academic capability as do norm-referenced ability tests. The “Nation’s Report Card” provides the clearest example. Proficiency levels of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds in reading, math, science, and other subjects are assessed by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which has been administered to large national samples of elementary and secondary students for the last three decades. Far from accusing the NAEP of cultural bias, educational policymakers (including those enacting the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002) take the NAEP results quite seriously, especially because they *do* reveal large racial gaps in demonstrably important academic skills, ranging from the most basic to the most advanced, at all three ages in all academic subjects in all 30 years that the NAEP has been conducted. These achievement gaps are comparable in magnitude to the IQ gaps between Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites, and by grade 12 they translate into Blacks’ being an average of four grade levels below Whites and Asians in achievement in core subjects, with Hispanics averaging about three grade equivalents behind (Gottfredson, 2003b). Because standardized tests are honest measures of intellectual and academic competence, we must conclude that racial-ethnic groups do, in fact, differ—and sometimes markedly so—in their distributions of intellectual talent.

Predictions from Distribution Theory. Standardized intelligence tests predict school achievement, job performance, and socioeconomic advancement moderately well in all American racial-ethnic groups, meaning that the skills deficits they reveal portend socially significant gaps in achievement, as well. What levels of racial-ethnic imbalance would Distribution Theory predict if gifted programs relied on (unbiased) intelligence tests to identify eligible students? If IQ 130 were set as the minimum threshold for giftedness, as many programs have done, about

2 to 3% of the general population would be found to exceed the threshold, but Blacks and Hispanics would only rarely be identified as gifted.

Figure 10.1 illustrates the degree of underrepresentation that would be expected across the nation were the entry threshold set at various different points along the IQ continuum. The ratios (or, more precisely, the odds) in the bottom rows of the figure are derived from the proportions of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, relative to the proportion of Whites, who score above given IQ levels in national samples. (Results for Native Americans would be much like those for Hispanics; Gottfredson, 2003b.) The ratios show that Blacks and Hispanics are relatively sparse at the highest levels of IQ. Severity of underrepresentation falls steadily at successively lower IQ thresholds, but is still meaningful as far down the IQ continuum as IQ 75. More specifically, if the threshold for entry into gifted education were set at IQ 125, the ratio of Blacks to Whites in representative samples would hover around 1:30, and for Hispanics 1:5. Asians would tend to be *overrepresented* above this IQ level by 2:1. Were the threshold lowered to the 50th percentile (IQ 100), racial imbalance would still be large: 1:3 for Blacks, 1:2 for Hispanics, and 6:5 for Asians.

Were standardized tests of achievement in core subjects used to identify gifted students, the same pattern of racial imbalance would emerge as for IQ tests. Table 10.1 shows the percentage of students in four racial-ethnic groups in grades 4, 8, and 12 who achieved at or above the "basic" level of proficiency in NAEP reading, math, and science from 1996 to 2000. (*Basic* is defined as "partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade"; Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999, p. 9). The table also shows the percentages who achieved at or above the "proficient" level in those subjects. If students were selected randomly from among those achieving at or above the "proficient" level, we would predict the proportion of minority students relative to the proportion of White students selected to be about 1:4 for Blacks, 1:3 for Hispanics, and 1:1 for Asians (these predictions are based on averaging the percentages across the three subjects and two grade levels). Once again, the ratios would be better for lower thresholds, but still far from "racial equity." For instance, were students selected randomly from among those performing merely at or above the "basic" level, the gaps would be, respectively, 1:2, 3:5, and 14:15 for the three groups. These latter ratios are similar to those for the relative percentages of each group scoring above the 25th percentile in IQ (IQ 90): 1:2 (Blacks), 2:3 (Hispanics), and 10:9 (Asians).

Equity-excellence tradeoff. Ford (2003, p. 507) reported the levels of under- or overrepresentation actually observed in gifted education programs from 1978 to 1992. In 1992, the proportions of Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians, and Whites in gifted education relative to their proportions in the general population were, respectively, .57, .58, .50, 1.75, and 1.21. Representation of the three underrepresented groups relative to Whites (about 1:2) is therefore far better than one would achieve even with random selection from among students in the top

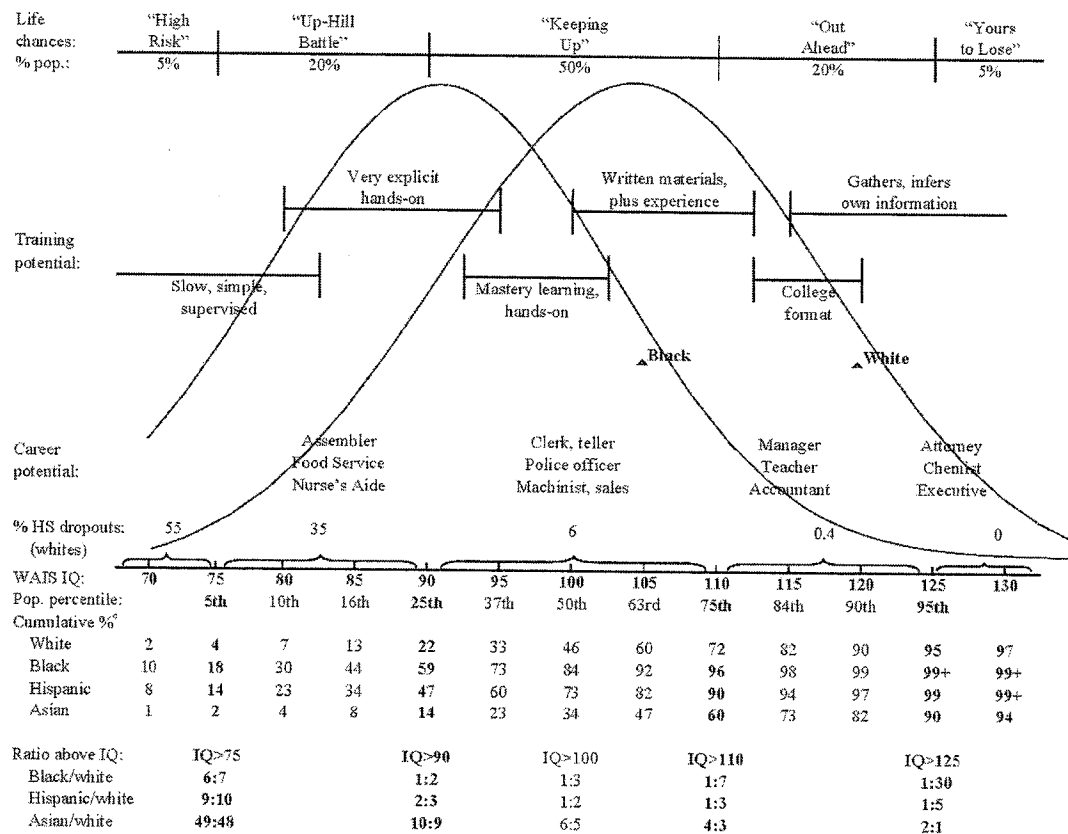


Figure 10.1. Relative representation of American Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians at different points along the IQ continuum

Note. Cumulative percentages are based on mean Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) IQs of 101.4 for Whites and 86.9 for Blacks and SDs of 14.7 and 13.0, respectively. Means for Hispanics and Asians are set, respectively, at 91 and 106, and SDs at 15 (based on data in Gottfredson, 2003b). Percentiles for IQ scores were estimated by use of cumulative normal probability tables. Minority/White ratios were calculated before percentiles were rounded.

Adapted from "Why *g* Matters: The Complexity of Everyday Life," by L. S. Gottfredson, 1997, *Intelligence*, 24, p. 117. Copyright ©1997 by Elsevier Science. Adapted with permission.

half of the distribution for either IQ or standardized achievement. These degrees of actual representation are similar to the racial imbalances found in Table 10.1 among students performing merely at or above the "basic" level in NAEP reading, math, and science. The underrepresentation observed is far smaller than what would be expected on the basis of group differences in cognitive ability and academic achievement. It therefore appears that standardized tests—and the real intellectual capabilities they measure—have played a far *smaller* role in identifying gifted children than usually claimed. From the perspective of the traditional definition of giftedness, there has been a sizeable tradeoff between racial balance and intellectual rigor in the identification of the gifted.

Ford (2003) has stated that discussion of any equity-excellence tradeoff is harmful and nonproductive. However, the tradeoff clearly does exist and warrants atten-

Table 10.1

**Percentages of Students Exceeding Particular NAEP
Proficiency Levels in Reading, Math, and Science,
by Race in Grades 4 and 12 During 1996–2000**

	% at or Above NAEP "Basic" Level of Proficiency ^a					
	Grade 4			Grade 12		
	Reading ^a 1998	Math ^b 1996	Science ^c 2000	Reading 1998	Math 1996	Science 2000
White	73	76	79	83	79	62
Black	36	32	34	57	38	22
Hispanic	40	41	42	64	50	30
Asian	69	73	66 ^d	75	81	59

	% at or Above NAEP "Proficient" Level					
	Grade 4			Grade 12		
	Reading 1998	Math 1996	Science 2000	Reading 1998	Math 1996	Science 2000
White	39	28	38	47	20	23
Black	10	5	7	18	4	3
Hispanic	13	8	11	26	6	7
Asian	37	26	29 ^d	38	33	26

Note.

^aSource of reading scores: Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo (1999).

^bSource of math scores: Reese, Miller, Mazzeo, & Dossey (1997).

^cSource of science scores: O'Sullivan, Lauko, Grigg, Qian, & Zhang (2003).

^dData for Asians is for 1996, not 2000.

tion. The tradeoff between (non-Asian) minority representation and the rigor of selection standards is a problem not only in gifted education, but anywhere that intellectual competence matters. Personnel psychologists have written extensively about exactly how large the tradeoff will be under different selection scenarios in both education and employment (Sackett, Schmitt, Ellingson, & Kabin, 2001). They have also documented that achieving racial parity in selection requires either that race itself be a major factor in selection or that selection be effectively stripped of intellectual demands (for a concrete example in police selection, see Gottfredson, 1996).

Can Democratization Produce Racial Parity in Gifted Education?

The tradeoff between racial balance and rigor in intellectual standards has led educators of the gifted, like personnel psychologists, to consider evaluating participants' strengths against other, less cognitive standards. The aim is to "desegregate" gifted education by "democratizing" it, in particular, by expanding the range of skills, abilities, and achievements counted as gifts and the variety of people enlisted to identify them. The merits of such democratization rest on answers to three questions: (1) How evenly is the suggested panoply of gifts distributed across demographic groups? (2) How independent of IQ/academic achievement are these other gifts? (3) Which ones should qualify as giftedness for instructional purposes?

Major Domains of Human Gifts and Accomplishments

The upper half of Figure 10.2 schematizes the growing consensus among differential psychologists on the structure and relatedness of human traits in the realms of cognitive ability and personality. These are, respectively, the major "can do" and "will do" traits known to affect performance. These two structures are used to organize the cacophony of specific gifts and talents that multidimensionalists have proposed. The entry in Figure 10.2 for "have done" factors (experience and practice) reminds us that no gift results in accomplishment without the opportunity and desire to exercise it.

The "can do" (ability) traits. The most important fact about cognitive abilities for our purposes is that, while there are many of them, they all correlate moderately to highly with each other. They can, however, be distinguished by their breadth of application, from highly general to very specific, which is referred to as the "hierarchical structure of mental abilities." Usually, three levels of generality-specificity are distinguished: general (Stratum III), broad (II), and specific (I). The most compelling evidence for this structure is provided by Carroll's (1993) Herculean reanalysis of a century of factor-analytic studies on the issue. Carroll reconfirmed that there is only one highly general ability, called *g* (short for the general mental ability factor). It is the major component and essential backbone of all other cognitive abilities. He could find no second general factor at the Stratum III level, and no one has ever been able to create a useful cognitive test that is not moderately to highly "*g* loaded." IQ tests measure *g* well.

At the next level of generality are the broad Stratum II abilities, often known as "group factors." Carroll (1993) referred to them as flavors of *g* because they are so highly correlated with it. He has identified eight (p. 626). For simplicity, Figure 10.2 includes only four and relabels them: verbal, mathematical, spatial, and auditory. These four appear to correspond to the four most intellectual of Gardner's hypothesized (but yet-unmeasured) "multiple intelligences" (linguistic, logical-mathematical, visuospatial, and musical; Carroll, p. 641). We may or may not wish

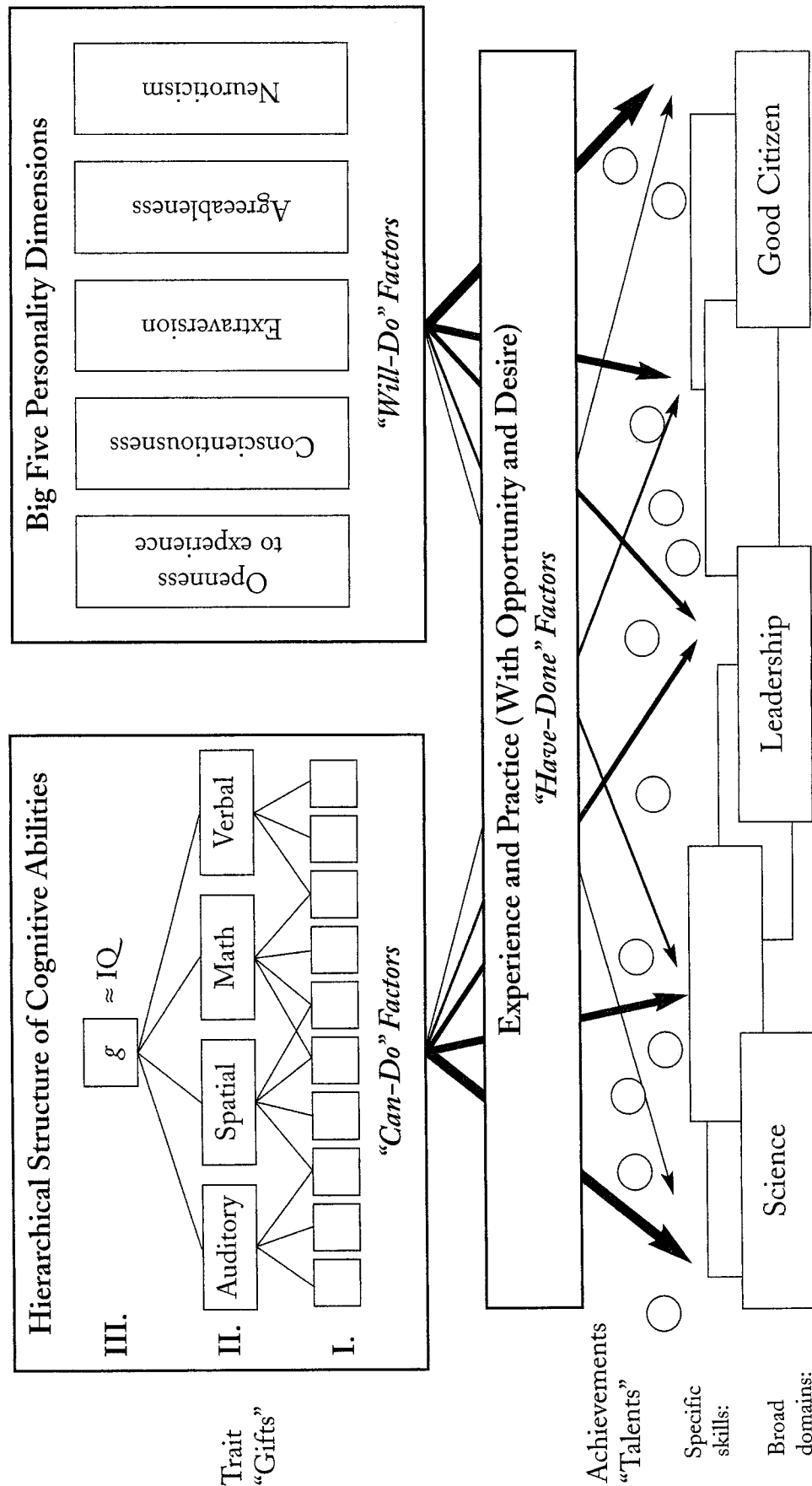


Figure 10.2. Summary of evidence on the structure of cognitive abilities and personality traits, the relation between the two domains, and their relation to giftedness

to label Gardner's constructs as intelligences, but Carroll's work now requires us to presume them all to be highly correlated manifestations of g . At the lowest level of the hierarchical structure are the dozens of Stratum I specific abilities, such as reading decoding, visual memory, flexibility of closure, and sound-frequency discrimination. They generally are not considered forms of giftedness for purposes of instruction in the public schools because they are so narrow in application.

Sternberg has suggested that his creative and practical intelligences sit astride analytical intelligence (g) as independent intelligences atop the hierarchy of mental abilities. However, his attempts to demonstrate their independence have not withstood scientific scrutiny by independent investigators, who have used his data to show that the three postulated intelligences are actually highly correlated (Brody, 2003) and that his often strong claims for the practical value of "practical intelligence" are unfounded (Gottfredson, 2003a). In other words, no one has ever demonstrated the existence of "many types of intelligences," if by "intelligence" we mean independent, empirically verified, highly general abilities in the cognitive realm. Gifted programs cannot take the measure of what does not exist.

Gifted programs generally target either the most general level of ability (g) or the next most general (the broad group factors). When targeting the latter, talent searches and gifted education programs often focus on one rather than another. For example, there are summer programs in mathematics and others in writing or music. The important point with regard to racial representation, however, is that, if a program selects students based on one of these broad Stratum II abilities, it will also be *implicitly selecting on g at the same time*, albeit somewhat less effectively than if it did so directly. Remarkable gifts in all these more specific, but still broad realms of ability rest on the same foundation of high g . No one possesses them in rare measure without also being considerably above average in g . Gardner himself has estimated that the famous exemplars of his seven intelligences all exceeded IQ 120 (the 90th percentile of the general population; Jensen, 1998, p. 128). More garden-variety gifts in these realms are likely to require at least an above-average level of g (IQ > 100; cf. Simonton, 1994, ch. 8). As can be calculated from Figure 10.1, racial imbalance relative to Whites is severe above IQ 120 (1:10 for Blacks, 1:3 for Hispanics, and 9:5 for Asians) and is still high above IQ 100 (1:3, 1:2, and 6:5, respectively, for the three groups).

To summarize, selecting on any cognitive ability will mean selecting on g , and the broader the ability is, the stronger the selection on g will be. The broader the cognitive ability targeted, the bigger the racial imbalances in gifted enrollments will be, all else equal.

The "will do" (personality) traits. We see a quite different picture in the realm of personality traits. There is no highly general "personality" factor comparable to g , but probably three to seven independent dimensions. The "Big Five" scheme is most often used, so that is what Figure 10.2 portrays: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Whereas the major group factors of ability are highly correlated, the major personality dimensions are

independent of each other. In addition, with the exception of a small correlation between facets of openness and conscientiousness, on the one hand, and crystallized *g* (i.e., verbal ability) on the other, none of the personality dimensions correlates meaningfully with *g* (see overview in Jensen, 1998, pp. 573–574). In other words, selecting on personality traits will *not* simultaneously select implicitly on *g*.

Although less is known about average racial differences along the “Big Five” dimensions of personality, evidence to date suggests that they range from small to nonexistent; but, when present, they often favor minorities (Russell, Reynolds, & Campbell, 1994). (Perhaps for this reason personality inventories are not accused of racial bias.) Identifying giftedness *solely* on the basis of personality traits would therefore produce near racial balance or a slight overrepresentation of minority groups. Neither the traditional definition of giftedness, nor the federal Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act, includes personality traits per se as gifts or talents; for instance, being extraverted (or its opposite, introverted), neurotic (or emotionally well-adjusted), or open to experience (or intellectually rigid). The radical multidimensionalist perspective makes room for them, however. Ford’s (2003, p. 508) list of Black cultural strengths would appear to include some such strictly noncognitive personal characteristics, for example, “verve” (energetic and lively) and “expressive individualism” (risk taker, independent, and impulsive). Stormont et al. (2001) also seemed to suggest extraversion as a gift when they included “expressiveness” as a form of giftedness (p. 419). It nonetheless seems unlikely that many educators of the gifted would, if explicitly asked, endorse attributes like extraversion and agreeableness (or their opposites) as gifts requiring special academic instruction.

Certain personality traits are important, however, in facilitating (or inhibiting) the translation of any gift into actual accomplishment. Renzulli’s (2003) conception of giftedness explicitly includes such factors—task commitment and creativity (conscientiousness and openness to experience?)—in addition to above-average ability. High ability, when not exploited, remains potential undeveloped—little more than an empty promise. This, of course, is the point of all discussions of greatness or genius that stress high intelligence as essential, but hardly sufficient, for culturally notable levels of achievement. Remarkable accomplishment in adulthood seems to be the multiplicative product of high intelligence, determination, and energy exercised in a chosen field (Simonton, 1994)—likewise in children, high intelligence (quick learner), the rage to master, and marching to one’s own drummer (Winner, 1996). That is, high levels of actual achievement—Gagné’s (2003) “talents” or Gardner’s (1983) “intelligences”—require the *combination* of favorable “can do” and “will do” traits, not just one or the other. Favorable personality traits may therefore supplement, but cannot replace, cognitive abilities when identifying children who do, or could, achieve academically or artistically at very high levels with suitable opportunity and support.

Actual accomplishments. Whereas the top half of Figure 10.2 highlights the major human traits that we might want to identify and students to exercise, the

bottom half samples the valued forms of cultural accomplishment that such exercise can produce. Some systems for identifying gifted children look to such signs of achievement in addition to, or instead of, indicators of mere promise of such. Figure 10.2 arrays sample achievements from left to right according to how dependent they are on cognitive ability relative to personality traits. This ordering is based on research examining the correlations of different personal traits (abilities, interests, temperaments) with different dimensions of job performance (core technical performance, leadership, self-discipline, etc.) when both the predictor and outcome domains are measured multidimensionally (see Gottfredson, 2002, for a review of relevant research).

Science appears to the left because academic and artistic achievements are highly *g* loaded. Leadership is displayed toward the center, as a moderately *g*-dependent achievement, because effective leadership depends at least moderately on favorable levels of both *g* and certain traits of personality and temperament. We might therefore expect selection for gifted leadership to be somewhat more racially balanced than selection on the more strictly intellectual achievements, but it would still be far from parity (at least in racially mixed groups). Among the least cognitive of the indisputably worthy social contributions is good citizenship—not necessarily being a leader of others, but contributing more than one's share to the common good and otherwise being a worthy role model. Being a person of high moral character who contributes to his or her community is within the reach of people of virtually all ability levels.

Because the dependence of achievements on *g* decreases from high to low as one moves left to right across the figure, we would also expect racial imbalance in selecting for specific achievements to drop from severe to mild (or nonexistent).

Prospects for Racial Balance Using Multidimensional Definitions and Multimodal Methods

Figure 10.2 arrays the full range of gifts and talents that both the traditional and multidimensionalist conceptions of giftedness encompass. The most traditional, most intelligence-based conception limits its focus to Stratum II and III cognitive gifts and their related, highly intellectual accomplishments to the lower left of the figure. The most radical multidimensionalists would include the entire spectrum of human strengths and accomplishments, befitting their effort to be maximally inclusive. This figure allows us to gain perspective on the claim that democratizing giftedness will desegregate it.

Multidimensional definitions. Among the traits in Figure 10.2, racial-ethnic groups differ most on the average on precisely those traits that are most intensely targeted by traditional conceptions of giftedness, that is, the most *g*-loaded abilities (general intelligence, verbal ability, spatial or mathematical reasoning, etc.) and accomplishments (in science, math, writing, or academics overall). As described earlier, racial imbalance among students enrolled in gifted programs will typically

be severe when these abilities and accomplishments are identified in a reliable, valid, race-blind manner.

Three strategies for defining giftedness more inclusively have been promoted as means of gaining racial balance in gifted enrollments. The first is simply to lower the threshold for classifying an intellectual strength as a gift: IQ or academic achievement need not be remarkable, but just above some moderately high level (Stormont et al., 2001). Recall Richert's (2003) APOGEE procedure, which classifies 25% of students in all schools, even low-performing ones, as gifted. Another example is the effort to make Advanced Placement (AP) courses more inclusive by enrolling students of more diverse ability levels. As the College Board now advertises, "AP isn't just for top students or those heading to college. AP offers something for everyone" (Bleske-Rechek, Lubinski, & Benbow, in press).

The second is to incorporate a greater variety of cognitive abilities, or "intelligences," in the definition of giftedness. However, any conception that emphasizes intellectual strengths will yield big racial imbalances because all cognitive abilities are moderately to highly correlated with *g*. Multidimensionalist conceptions of this moderate sort will produce racial imbalances almost as severe as the traditional conception when both are implemented in an equally reliable, valid, and race-blind manner. So, too, will full, faithful (and race-blind) implementation of the Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act, which defines giftedness as the potential for remarkably high performance in intellectual/creative/artistic areas, leadership, or specific academic fields. Adding somewhat less cognitive traits such as leadership and "interpersonal intelligence" to the basket of intellectual gifts and talents does virtually nothing to decrease racial imbalance because those additions are themselves moderately *g*-loaded. The democracy promised by the more inclusive, but still primarily cognitive, definitions is chimerical because it rests on the mistaken notion that the new abilities are independent of the old.

The third way of democratizing giftedness is to extend it beyond the cognitive realm. Successively more expansive conceptions will produce smaller racial imbalances to the extent that they incorporate and weight heavily the primarily noncognitive traits and accomplishments to the right in Figure 10.2. But, even the most inclusive definition will not yield anything near racial parity as long as cognitive abilities and accomplishments remain in the basket. The addition of noncognitive traits can dilute, but never erase, the influence of *g*, as personnel research has shown (Sackett et al., 2001). To erase the racial imbalances that are created by average differences in *g*, there would have to be (but are not) group differences in noncognitive gifts that are equal in size, but opposite in direction, to those in the cognitive sphere.

Impact of multimodal measurement. Multimodal techniques cannot identify gifts that do not exist. Human competence is not unexplored terrain, with major continents of ability yet to be discovered. Anyone who claims to glimpse them must provide solid proof of their existence. Multidimensionalists, however, tend to reject, rather than embrace, sound psychometric techniques for certifying talent.

Their multimodal approach to assessment seems to attain more even demographic representation mostly by degrading the measurement of competence, even if unwittingly so. No one, of course, would openly espouse such degradation, but it is actually a well-trod path in the pursuit of racial balance. There are periodic claims in personnel psychology, for instance, to have dramatically reduced disparate impact (racial imbalance) in hiring by inventing more “sophisticated” selection techniques. When unraveled, these “modern,” “nontraditional” assessments are always shown to work by systematically *reducing* the validity and reliability of selection batteries (Gottfredson, 1996).

The same Faustian advances are now being advocated in gifted education to solve the same sociopolitical problem: When the distributions of *g* for different groups in a setting differ substantially, the only way to achieve racial balance while still claiming to look for exceptional cognitive abilities is to *avoid* using valid, unbiased (psychometrically sound) measures of *g*-loaded abilities and accomplishments while appearing to do otherwise. One method is, in the name of racial justice, to score tests differently by race (e.g., race-norming) in order to compensate for average differences in *g*, a practice that is now illegal in hiring. A second is to use highly subjective or otherwise unreliable identification procedures (ratings of unclear constructs by diverse, untrained raters) in order to greatly degrade or randomize selection on *g*. A third is to look for any of a wide variety of *narrow* (and hence highly experience-sensitive) cognitive skills, a practice that will give greater weight to any adventitious context-specific experience than to enduring cross-context general abilities. Richert’s (2003) APOGEE program employs all three methods.

What Should the Aims of Gifted Education Be?

Critics of gifted education argue that it must be “desegregated”—that is, mirror the demographic composition of the community—to assure racial equity. The term *desegregation* connotes a moral or legal imperative. It falsely presumes that Discrimination Theory is correct when, in fact, Distribution Theory has far stronger empirical support. Racial discrimination may still occur, but the large racial disparities in school performance and eligibility for traditional gifted programs can be explained fully by group disparities in *g*.

Gifted education is in an especially difficult position among instructional programs because it has typically targeted individuals at the right tail of the IQ bell curve—just where racial disproportions happen to be most extreme. I know of no other distributional difference between the races that is as large as this one. The equity-excellence tradeoff is thus especially stark when giftedness is defined in traditional terms, but it can be expected to be substantial even under the most inclusive conceptions when intellectual giftedness is allowed to influence selection, as it should.

Because psychometrically sound methods of identifying giftedness yield the biggest racial imbalances, it was entirely predictable that pressure would mount, as

it has, to compromise validity for racial parity in gifted placements (VanTassel-Baska, Johnson, & Avery, 2002). In the name of democratizing gifted education, we are now being urged to reject reliable, valid, unbiased measures of well-recognized broad cognitive abilities in favor of their opposite: unreliable, subjective, undocumented measures of unspecified narrow strengths. Advocates justify this call by labeling the psychometrically superior methods "biased," "narrow," and "exclusionary," while anointing the psychometrically unsound methods as more "democratic," "inclusive," "equitable," and "authentic."

Democratizing the selection of gifted children has also predictably led to efforts to democratize the instruction of students so identified. By enrolling students with many different and vaguely defined kinds of personal strengths, but often weaker academic ones, educators cannot differentiate the curriculum to suit the needs of remarkably talented students of any sort. In fact, multidimensionalists themselves speak of instructing their wide variety of potentially gifted students within the same classroom. This is akin to asking a single coach to develop, in the same training sessions, the talents of the school's top prospects in basketball, football, tennis, and swimming. When all types are served together, none is served well.

The multidimensionalists' relative lack of interest in instructional programs for truly exceptional students who languish unchallenged in the regular curricula that schools provide suggests that their first goal is to equalize educational outcomes across the races, rather than provide appropriate instruction to unusually gifted individuals of any race. They focus on inequality, not exceptionality (Benbow & Stanley, 1996). Consider Ford's (2003) five strategies for better meeting the needs of gifted minority students: They have nothing to do with giftedness per se, but represent typical recommendations for raising achievement levels in poor-performing minority populations. Multidimensionalist recommendations for instruction focus not on compacted curricula, acceleration, or early entrance, but on remediating academic deficiencies. They don't focus on providing intellectual challenge, but on emotional support. Block out the word *gifted* in such discussions, and it is hard to discern that giftedness is their ostensible focus. Likewise, the evidence that Richert (2003) provides for the success of her APOGEE program is that it increased average test scores in poor-performing schools. That is a worthy accomplishment, to be sure, but it suggests that the cachet and resources of gifted programs are being appropriated for the larger effort to close the achievement gaps between demographic groups.

Narrowing the current large racial gaps in academic achievement is an important social goal, one that often dominates American political discourse and drives social policy. But, these gaps are precisely the reason why we cannot attain "racial equity" in gifted education at this time, at least not without repudiating its *raison d'être* and emptying equity of meaning.

No one questions the need for special educational services for students in the lowest percentiles of the IQ distribution ($IQ < 70$). All students need appropriate developmental placement. Students who are equally atypical at the other extreme

(IQ > 130) also merit instruction that is more suitable to their cognitive capacity than what regular school curricula can provide. Gifted programs should continue to search out the extraordinarily talented in all social groups by using the soundest techniques at their disposal. They should likewise continue to do what they do best and what no other education program attempts to do: provide a menu of developmental opportunities for exceptionally able children so that they may realize their potential.