Diversity of giftedness and accessibility of provisions: Equity for Gifted English Language Learners

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Diversity evident in Australian society is mirrored in our student populations. Like most student groupings, such diversity signposts that gifted students are not homogenous, and are in fact, a diverse group of individually characterised students. Unlike some other student groups however, gifted students may require different programs, specific strategies, and/or additional provisions to meet their unique characteristics and needs to support their talent development.

Diversity in this context is reflected in the interrelationship within and between gifted students': *domain of giftedness*—e. g., intellectual, creative, social, physical (Gagné, 2009); *type of giftedness*—e. g., twice-exceptional, at risk, autonomous, underground (Neihart & Betts, 2010); *level of giftedness*—e.g., mildly to profoundly gifted (Gross, 2010); *intrapersonal characteristics*—e.g., motivation, resilience, or others; *interpersonal characteristics*—e. g., social communication, friendship-building, or others; and *environmental influences*. Some environmental influences include students' heritage, family dynamics, political circumstances, educational contexts, acculturation issues, immigration, societal attitudes or advocacy, policies, educators, curricula, teaching, learning, or access to resources (Blackburn & Smith, in press).

The complexity of gifted students' diversity is also evident when the individual student exhibits characteristics across more than one domain of giftedness, with more than one type of giftedness, at a very advanced level, with conflicting interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics. For example, a student can be highly intellectually and creatively gifted, have twice-exceptionalities, and be an autonomous learner, with access to the educational resources required for talent to ensue. However, many other gifted students may not have access to the environmental catalysts to nurture their talent.

One group of diversely gifted students is Gifted English Language Learners (GELLs) who are dual or multi-language learners and have exceptional capacity of learning languages. The intersections between the aforementioned personal and environmental factors have many implications for GELLs, such as social-cultural barriers, inaccurate identification or misdiagnoses; underachievement; mismatched curricula, inequity in provisions and resources, marginalization; underrepresentation in gifted programs, or overrepresentation in special education programs (Blackburn & Smith, in press). Other specific difficulties may include linguistic limitations, task avoidance, lack of time-management, distraction, boredom, low self-efficacy, or psychosocial stressors that inhibit learning (Blackburn, 2016) while students' strengths and interests are often overlooked. For gifted students:

> a sense of belonging means feeling accepted, appreciated, and understood in [their] relationships with individuals and groups of people. However, students who have abilities and qualities that are exceptionally advanced

and qualitatively different from their same age peers may experience a sense of alienation. Gifted students are seeking intellectual, social, and emotional connectedness. (Riley & White, 2016, p. 211)

The influences within the educational environment can initiate the journey to accessibility and equity for diversely gifted students. Riley and White (2016) reinforce that recognition of inequities should precede provisions that lead to successful student outcomes. If we take the view of the student as an individual whose individual needs should be nurtured, then the following recommendations for practice may go some way to ensuring equity in GELLs' educational provisions, for example, increasing:

- inclusion (and decreasing underrepresentation) in relevant programs and provisions with culturally relevant assessment and equitable identification processes with multiple criteria (ACARA, nd; Ford, 2013);
- understanding that the students' heritage language is a means of learning the new language (Blackburn, 2016);
- students' sense of belonging and participation through prioritising proficiency of English language acquisition for successful learning outcomes (Sisk, 2015);
- students' self-esteem (and decreasing cultural barriers) through teaching acceptance, respect, identity, and celebration of cultural values within whole school practices and events (Garcia, 2002);
- learning (and decreasing underachievement) through new language immersion and dual language learning using code switching between students' known and new language to contextualise advanced language capacities and exploration of varying concepts during instruction (Blackburn, 2016; Green, Spivey, Ferris, Bernal, & Izquierdo, 2011);
- culturally-diverse and culturally-inclusive differentiated curricula in the classroom, including above grade challenge through accelerated learning with English language emphasised beyond the classroom (Sisk, 2015);
- equity opportunities within culturally valid, strength-based differentiated pedagogy to address individual student's diversity through inclusiveness, multidimensionality, empowerment, and transformation (Gay, 2010);
- achievement by teaching students time management and learning engagement, strategies to overcome psychosocial stressors, and decrease language and socio-cultural differences (Blackburn, 2016);
- collaboration, belonging, communication skills, higher-order-thinking skills, social engagement, and friendship-building in like-minded groupings for specialized instruction that matches students' interests and needs e. g., service-based projects (Riley & White, 2016; Smith, 2017);
- educators' cultural-responsiveness to enable their understanding of acculturation. Intentionally scaffolding meaningful student learning could nurture cultural identity for more equitable student learning outcomes (Blackburn & Smith, in press, np);
- advocacy and collaboration between all stakeholders as support for students, parents, and teachers alike (Smith, 2017).

Blackburn and Smith (in press) state that:
the prominent gap in support services for GELLs should be alleviated with increased representation of GELLs in gifted education programs. This can

only be achieved with more equitable identification processes using multiple techniques that recognise students' diverse strengths and leads to purposefully designed and relevant curriculum and pedagogy that reflect cultural and linguistic diversity. (Blackburn & Smith, in press)

Overall, accurate identification should be the prelude for teaching to GELLs' individual social, emotional, intellectual, and academic needs using culturally-sensitive strategies in unison with their language acquisition. This view underlays more equitable provisions and accessibility to gifted education programs that support diversely gifted English language learners' connectedness and talent development.

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