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START



SEEING & SERVING UNDERSERVED GIFTED STUDENTS

50 Strategies for Equity and Excellence ←

Jennifer Ritchotte, Ph.D.
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Praise for **START SEEING & SERVING** **UNDERSERVED GIFTED STUDENTS**

“Enormous kudos to the authors! Many have written on the *need to* ‘see and serve’ underserved and underresourced gifted students, including English language learners, culturally and linguistically diverse students, economically disadvantaged students, and twice-exceptional students. But this book is unique; it is practical and strategic in that it extends to the *how to* ‘see and serve’ these students by providing a plethora of classroom-friendly steps and activities *any* teacher can take to create an environment of equity and excellence for all students in their classes. The abundant strategies, vignettes, checklists, and surveys help teachers home in on all students’ diverse learning needs. This book essentially operationalizes NAGC’s tenets of *See Me, Know Me, Teach Me, and Challenge Me*, which very successfully represent the framework of the book itself. Founded in research, teaching pedagogy, and practical experiences, this resource should be in every teacher’s classroom. *Start Seeing and Serving Underserved Gifted Students* poignantly guides us to reflect on our own personal biases and inherent views of others and move toward newfound respect and relationship-building.”

—**Dina Brulles, Ph.D.**, director of gifted education, Paradise Valley Unified School District, and School District Representative, National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Board of Directors


“*Start Seeing and Serving Underserved Gifted Students* is an easy-to-read, easy-to-use, practical, and much-needed resource for educators. The authors not only demonstrate research- and evidence-based best practices in the field of gifted education, but also give real-world examples from educators who have identified and met the needs of underserved and underrepresented gifted students in their classrooms and schools by using the toolkit strategies. This book is a valuable tool that is greatly needed to identify, understand, and meet the needs of underserved gifted students whose potential, creativity, curiosity, and gifts must be nurtured and developed.”

—**Lois Baldwin, Ed.D.**, 2e educational consultant and president and cofounder of the Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students (AEGUS)

“From start to finish, this creatively formatted, multilayered book feels new—unclichéd, generative, and crackling with energy and optimism about caring adults responding to complex needs of diverse students. It is full of practical, personalized strategies, including for engaging families and community, flexibly grouping students according to interests and needs, and attending to social and emotional development. Concepts do not feel ‘borrowed’ because they are explained through real-world experiences of creative educators, and strategies are often unique to the book. Particularly important is the continual emphasis on teacher and student self-reflection, on incorporating the arts, and on the importance of language development. Fundamentally, the perspective of this book is developmental, with a focus on growth for everyone involved.”

—**Jean Sunde Peterson, Ph.D.**, professor emerita, Purdue University, and author of *Counseling Gifted Students and Get Gifted Students Talking*



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Dedication

To all our former, current, and future students of all ages who inspired us to write this book. And to our friends, families, and loved ones who provided endless encouragement and support throughout this incredible journey. Also, to the educators working with and advocating for gifted learners, particularly underserved gifted learners, thank you for all you do.



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Introduction

Late one afternoon several years ago, a teacher from a Title I school contacted our university office where we housed a summer program for more than two hundred gifted children in preK through grade 12. Earlier in the year, she had helped one of her students apply for the program, and we had awarded that student a full scholarship to attend. She was excited that her student would be able to participate, and she wanted to let us know how excited he was too. As she continued talking, she shared that she would be the one driving him to and from the program, about an hour each way. She said, “His mother doesn’t drive, so he’s actually never been outside the town he lives in.” She asked what she should tell her student to pack for the dance on the program’s final night: “Will the kids be dressed up? Should he bring his church clothes?” She concluded the conversation by telling us she had collected money for her student from the teachers at her school, since she didn’t want him to feel left out if the other kids brought spending money for lunch and snacks.

This student was not the first or the last gifted student from an underresourced community we have worked with, but his story illustrates how educators so often go above and beyond to support their students. Most teachers lack the capacity to drive students to and from additional classes or to collect money for them, but this is one example of a teacher’s steadfast commitment. There are countless other examples. The importance of caring and committed teachers who see the potential in their underserved gifted learners and who support them in fulfilling that potential cannot be overstated. Yet many of the teachers we’ve worked with over the years have had no training, either preservice or professional development, designed to help them recognize and develop the intellectual and creative strengths that exist in their diverse student populations. So even with the best intentions—which we believe all teachers have—the teachers had limited strategies for meeting gifted students’ needs.

We wrote this book for you, the educators who wake up every day with your hearts and minds set on making a positive difference in your students’ lives. And we wrote it for your students, who are counting on you never to stop seeing and believing in their potential.

A Call to Serve Underserved Gifted Learners

The term *underserved* is traditionally used in educational research to describe individuals from certain groups whose needs are not consistently met in K–12 schools. From our experience, underserved gifted students reflect the diversity of public school students: they are students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds, students who are English language learners (ELL), students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, and twice-exceptional (2e) students. This

book's chapters are organized according to the four pillars of the Giftedness Knows No Boundaries campaign of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC): "See Me," "Understand Me," "Teach Me," and "Challenge Me," followed by a fifth chapter titled "Advocate for Me." One of the primary goals of the NAGC campaign is to bring awareness to the unique learning needs of gifted students.

Using the pillars of this campaign as a framework, the intent of this book is to promote equity and excellence in schools by giving you a variety of teaching tools. You can use these tools to recognize the potential and foster the academic, social, and emotional growth of the underserved gifted learners you care so deeply about. Although the primary focus of this book is gifted learners, the teaching and learning activities can be adapted easily for other learners in your classrooms and for any age group, ranging from kindergarten through high school.

As you read this book, we hope that you will begin or continue to:

- ▶ recognize the strengths of underserved gifted learners in your schools and classrooms
- ▶ become aware of your implicit bias and how it affects your teaching
- ▶ understand the academic, social, and emotional needs of your underserved gifted learners
- ▶ create a culturally responsive learning environment
- ▶ provide high-quality instruction that shows how much you care about your students' learning
- ▶ carry out challenging instruction to help your underserved gifted learners soar
- ▶ advocate for your underserved gifted learners on a micro and macro scale

We hope this book inspires you to become a change agent for your underserved gifted learners. Meanwhile, we also hope this book fills your teaching toolkit with many new strategies that you can use right away to better meet the unique needs of all your students.

About This Book

Chapter 1: See Me focuses on the need to identify and cultivate *potential* (as opposed to developing talents). It provides proactive strategies to help you spot evidence of high potential in your students. It also confronts issues that hinder identification of underserved gifted learners and their access to gifted programming.

Chapter 2: Understand Me includes strategies to help you create a culturally responsive learning environment in which your underserved gifted learners can thrive. Creating such an environment begins with knowing and appreciating who your underserved gifted learners are and what they need to feel engaged and excited to learn. We also provide tips for involving both students and their families in the learning process.

In **Chapter 3: Teach Me**, you will find an abundance of strategies to support not only the learning of your underserved gifted students, but also the learning of *all* the

students in your classroom. We use the acronym CARE to represent the strategies in this chapter. To recognize and develop our students' strengths, we must:

- Connect learning to their lives
- Ability group them in flexible ways
- Respectfully differentiate their learning
- Engage them in higher-level thinking activities

In **Chapter 4: Challenge Me**, we share toolkit strategies that focus on advanced learning options for underserved gifted learners. You will want to embed challenge thoughtfully into your students' learning experiences and provide supports to help them accomplish difficult tasks. We chose the acronym ASPIRE to sum up the strategies in this chapter, because we want underserved gifted learners to aspire to reach their fullest potential, and we want you to aspire to provide your students with learning experiences that help them shine their brightest. You can accomplish this goal when you:

- Add challenge thoughtfully
- Supply the support necessary for success
- Provide opportunities for mentorships
- Identify possibilities for independent investigations
- Recognize when acceleration is vital
- Embed curriculum compacting into learning units

In the final chapter, **Chapter 5: Advocate for Me**, we help you prepare to become a change agent for your underserved gifted learners. We provide toolkit strategies for advocacy at the micro and macro levels, including finding your advocacy focus, setting SMART goals (goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timebound), designing professional learning activities, and creating an action plan that incorporates the strategies from chapters 1 through 4 that you are most excited to try.

Throughout the book, you will find the following recurring elements:

Toolkit Strategies. You will find fifty strategies for promoting equity and excellence for underserved gifted learners throughout the five chapters of this book. Many of these strategies are best practice for working with gifted learners. However, we have adapted some strategies and created new strategies to address the unique learning needs of underserved gifted learners.

Real-World Examples. In each chapter, we present real stories from our classroom experiences and from those of educators we have worked with through the years. The purpose of these snapshots is to give you practical, authentic ideas for applying many of the strategies you will find in each chapter.

Spotlights. Throughout this book, you will find several Spotlights written by educators who care deeply about underserved gifted learners. In these in-depth features, educators share insights from their personal experiences in supporting and advocating for underserved gifted learners.

What I Want You to Know About Me. Over the years, author Amy Graefe has asked her gifted students to write down what they want their teachers to know about them—beyond what their test scores and other data reveal. Amy has used these notes to get to know her students better and to personalize learning opportunities and supports for them. She has also shared these notes with the students' other teachers, so they, too, could understand and serve the students better. We've included quotes from Amy's students throughout this book, so you can hear from actual underserved gifted learners what they wish their teachers knew about them.

How to Use This Book

We created many of the strategies in this book from our own experiences as educators and researchers, with underserved gifted learners specifically in mind. We chose not to align specific strategies with specific groups of underserved learners, because that would be a nearly impossible task given the unique and diverse individual needs that exist within special populations of learners. Additionally, many strategies may benefit multiple populations of underserved gifted learners, so we don't want to limit your use of them. Although we wrote this book with underserved gifted learners in mind, we believe that *all* students need culturally responsive teaching and *all* students can benefit from gifted-education strategies. We also believe that at different points in time, *all* students require targeted supports to develop their potential. We believe that one-size-fits-all teaching is inappropriate for any student—and especially for underserved gifted learners, who come to school with diverse skill sets, ability levels, supports outside the classroom, and lived experiences that need to be honored in the classroom and school communities. Therefore, we've adapted many strategies that represent good teaching for all learners to make them even more beneficial for underserved gifted learners, in addition to creating new strategies with underserved gifted students specifically in mind.

We'd like you to begin reading this book with the goal of transforming learning experiences for *each and every* student in your classroom, focusing on how you can improve the education your underserved gifted students are currently receiving and will receive in the future. This focus will require you to pause and reflect constantly on current practices in your classroom and school. We do not want you to feel discouraged by what's not happening in your classroom and school, but rather to feel empowered by all the strategies in this book that you can use right away to improve the educational experiences of your underserved gifted learners.

We strongly recommend that you complete the reproducible checklist provided at the end of every chapter to help you identify your areas of strength in supporting underserved gifted learners and your areas for improvement. These checklists are based on the strategies presented in each chapter. They point you toward topics you might want to revisit in this book. Consider these checklists as progress checkups that tell you where you are in terms of applying the strategies in this book: beginning, developing, or leading.

You may choose to read this book from cover to cover, comprehensively learning ways to see, understand, teach, challenge, and advocate for underserved gifted learners. Or, you may choose to go straight to strategies that you feel could benefit

your students right now. This book is designed to be read either way, and its strategies can be adapted easily for any grade level and subject area.

If you decide to pick and choose specific strategies, please be sure to visit chapter 5; we share concrete steps for turning the knowledge you've acquired from this book into an action plan you can carry out to make a positive impact on the lives of your underserved gifted learners. We believe that the pursuit of equity and excellence for underserved gifted learners requires a commitment not only to learning who these students are and how educators can best support them, but also to advocating on their behalf.

Although you can pick strategies to use depending on your classroom and school needs, please keep in mind that even if you were to implement all fifty strategies in this book, achieving equity and excellence for your underserved gifted students will be an ongoing journey. This book is a starting point for many of you and a midpoint for others, intended to provide you with information to consider and ideas to help your underserved gifted students realize and achieve their full potential.

We trust that you'll gain valuable insights from reading this book, and we hope you'll feel inspired to advocate for your underserved gifted learners like never before. Let's get started!

Jennifer Ritchotte
Chin-Wen Lee
Amy Graefe

1

SEE ME

Every day in a hundred small ways our children ask,
“Do you see me? Do you hear me? Do I matter?”
Their behavior often reflects our response.

—L. R. Knost



At some point in your career, you may have overheard statements similar to this one: “I’ve been teaching for many years. I know what I’m doing, and I treat all students equally. I don’t know why we need to focus on diversity so much. I just don’t get it.” On the surface, the teacher who says this may seem to be doing the right thing by striving to teach all her students equally. However, the phrase *treat all students equally* implies that the teacher is giving all her students the exact same learning opportunities and supports. This approach runs counter to best practice in education.

Equity, not equality, needs to be the teacher’s goal. Treating students equitably means providing all students with learning opportunities and supports according to their unique needs. Treating students equitably is the best way to ensure students have opportunities to demonstrate and cultivate their potential. Educating students in an equitable manner means that teachers must recognize and honor the diversity of their students. Teachers must make meaningful efforts to see who students are and what they are capable of contributing and achieving.

It takes courage to examine honestly what you believe about educating gifted students from underserved populations and to reflect on how your thinking and actions support or contradict these beliefs. Throughout this chapter, as you consider your beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors, you may feel uncomfortable at times, and *that is okay*. When it happens, stop and ask yourself this question: “What’s best for my students?”

Let’s begin our journey toward seeing underserved gifted learners more clearly.

Who Are Underserved Gifted Students?

What does it mean to be underserved, or underrepresented, in gifted education? Underserved gifted students are those whose needs are not being met in general education settings. Underrepresentation can be evaluated by examining the data on who is identified—and being served—as gifted in a given setting. For example, if most of the students at a school identify as Latinx, but most of the students receiving gifted or advanced academic programming are *not* Latinx, then Latinx students are underserved in that particular gifted-education program.

In this chapter, we talk specifically about four groups of students who often fall into the category of underserved gifted learners:

- ▶ students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds
- ▶ English language learners (ELL students)
- ▶ learners who are economically disadvantaged
- ▶ twice-exceptional (2e) learners (students who are both gifted and have one or more other special needs)

A Note About Gifted Students in Underresourced Rural and Urban Areas

Gifted students living in rural and urban areas do not fit into the underserved category by virtue of geographical location alone. It would be inaccurate to say that *all* gifted students attending schools in rural and urban areas are *underserved* by existing gifted programs and services in the same way that students from historically underserved populations are. The term underresourced is an important distinction to use when referring to these geographical areas, because many—but certainly not all—inner-city schools and rural schools are located in low-income areas lacking educational infrastructure, such as libraries, community centers, youth programs, and gifted services.

Although we must be careful not to assume that all gifted students living in urban and rural areas are from CLD backgrounds, are ELL students, are economically disadvantaged, or are twice-exceptional, these underserved groups of students certainly do attend schools in these geographical regions. Further, due to limited resources and lack of teacher training in many of these districts, other students attending these underresourced schools also might not have the opportunity to be identified for gifted programming. Because of these overlapping challenges, the strategies in this book will prove useful to teachers in underresourced rural and urban schools too.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners are students growing up in households that differ in some way from the system-normed, white, middle-to-upper-class North American household. This group includes, but is not limited to, students whose cultural heritage is African, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Middle Eastern, Russian, or Alaska Native. It also includes students who are proficient in English but whose home language is not English.

According to a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), roughly 80 percent of public school teachers and administrators in the United States are white, while fewer than half of public school students are white (Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow 2019). In 2018, NCES projections for the 2018–2019 school year indicated that the 50.7 million public school students entering preK through grade 12 would include 26.6 million students of color: 14.0 million Hispanic students, 7.8 million black students, 2.6 million Asian students, 0.2 million Pacific Islander students, 0.5 million American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 1.6 million students of two or more races. Meanwhile, the percentage of white students enrolled in public schools was projected to continue declining through at least fall 2027 (National Center for Education Statistics 2018).

With changing demographic realities, it becomes increasingly important for educators to understand how their cultural experiences and backgrounds influence how they “see” their students. As Jean Sunde Peterson, professor emerita and former director of school counselor preparation at Purdue University, has pointed out, “The concept of giftedness appears to be bound to context. Each culture sees goodness through its own cultural lens, including the dominant culture, which has its own particular value orientation” (Peterson 1999). Various cultural groups often see giftedness through distinct lenses. White, middle-class teachers, who are heavily represented in K–12 classrooms, may place too much emphasis on IQ, achievement, intense interest in topics in the cultural mainstream, precocious verbal ability, and motivation when they are nominating students for gifted programming. However, the cultures of individual groups of underserved students may not value overt displays of ability, achievement, and talents; competing with peers; promoting individual accomplishments; or respectfully challenging authority figures and peers during learning opportunities. Rather, some cultural groups place more value on collaboration, listening, humility, selflessness, family support, and community service. Further, underserved students may not show interest in subject matter that teachers personally value as important, and as a result, these students unknowingly miss opportunities to demonstrate their capability to their teachers. It is only through assimilating to what the dominant culture values that many underserved students are eventually identified as gifted. Due to these realities, it is important to choose culturally sensitive and relevant options when assessing these students for gifted programming.

Pause and ask yourself these questions:

- ▶ Having learned (or been reminded) that giftedness may manifest differently in each culture, what have I observed about the way in which my CLD students express their learning?
- ▶ What difficulties might I encounter in evaluating my CLD students’ strengths if they are hesitant to share their accomplishments, don’t enjoy competing academically, or avoid disagreeing with others?
- ▶ In thinking about CLD students in my classroom, who has exhibited strengths in collaboration, listening, humility, selflessness, family support, and community service?
- ▶ If my CLD students had the opportunity to nominate themselves for accelerated or enrichment programs, what would they say their strengths were?

English Language Learners

For our purposes, English language learning (ELL) students are students whose lack of English proficiency could negatively affect their academics in some way. Perhaps the student doesn’t speak English at all, or the student does speak English, but not at the level needed to succeed independently without support in the classroom. ELL students could be children born inside or outside the United States or Canada. They might speak fluently in Spanish, Mandarin, French, Russian, Arabic, or any other language that is not English. ELL students may also include Alaska Natives and American Indians.

English language learners deserve our attention for two important reasons:

1. This population is growing every year with an estimated 4.9 million students in total (National Center for Education Statistics 2019b).
2. Lack of English proficiency may create barriers to success for learners not only in school, but also in their social communities and other areas of their lives.

You may teach some ELL students who are able to communicate well in some instances. You might note that your ELL students can be kind, diligent, and helpful, especially since many of these students act as translators and become the primary source of communication between teachers and families. These qualities might cause some confusion when ELL students do not perform well academically. You might wonder, “How can such a competent child be doing so poorly in my class?”

Often, teachers mistakenly assume that because students can carry on a conversation in English, they should have no problem with English in an academic setting. It’s important to understand that *social* language skills (basic interpersonal communication skills) are different from *academic* language skills (proficiency with language in intellectual contexts). Social language proficiency takes one to three years to develop, whereas academic language proficiency can take four to six years. Until gifted ELL students develop academic language mastery, they may struggle to perform at a level considered “proficient” on various academic activities and assessments—including gifted and talented assessments—that focus heavily on language.

Due to these challenges, it is important to incorporate nonverbal or performance-based options when assessing these students for gifted programming. While it may take time for ELL students to develop English proficiency, many gifted ELL students learn languages at an accelerated pace. This is a primary indicator of giftedness you may see in ELL students: children who are learning English (both social and academic) at a much faster rate than other ELL students. You may see gifted ELL students being very articulate during role-playing and storytelling activities; being able to understand jokes in English; or learning in both English and their first language. Pay attention to these clues. They will help you “see” your underserved gifted ELL students more clearly.

Maria was a sixth-grade ELL student who rarely asked questions and never seemed to need teacher assistance. This led her to “disappear” in most of her classes, except Ms. Nelson’s science class. That year, Ms. Nelson decided to increase the challenge of her class by establishing a new grading system. In the new system, performing at an A level meant “exceeding grade-level expectations,” performing at a B level meant “meeting grade-level expectations,” performing at a C level meant “approaching grade-level expectations,” and performing at a D or F level meant “not meeting grade-level expectations.” Most students performed at a B level, because they chose not to push themselves to exceed sixth-grade science standards. Maria was one of three students in the class who consistently performed above grade-level expectations. Her writing used scientific language, she expanded on her ideas, and she learned new concepts quickly. This caught Ms. Nelson’s attention early in the school year. Maria’s performance was not typical compared to that of

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