

## Parental Differences in Expectations of Gifted Children\*

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The under representation of minority populations in gifted education has motivated a wide range of initiatives throughout the United States. These reforms usually support alternative "culture free" screening and identification procedures. One example is the increasing reliance on nominations from teachers who are guided by a check list of behaviors commonly attributed to exceptional children. It is assumed that these broader methods of assessment will be more equitable to ethnic and low income students. In order to supplement the judgment of educators, student nominations are also welcomed from sources outside the school. Parents are sometimes asked to rank their child on a series of statements which describe personal observations of abilities that might otherwise go undetected (Johnson, Starnes, Gregory & Blaylock, 1985; Ortiz & Volloff, 1987).

These efforts to identify nontraditional students for admission to gifted classes are commendable. At the same time it is important to enlarge the size of the recruitment pool by impacting on family variables known to increase children's creativity and intelligence (Khatena, 1989). Parent influence is critical in guiding child growth and encouraging the maintenance of culturally defined values (Strom & Johnson, 1986). Thus, the extent to which youngsters from ethnic and low income families have the opportunity at home to develop skills and behaviors congruent with accepted definitions of giftedness depends on parent expectations (Alwinn, 1988; Johnson, Workman & Gage, 1987; Torrance & Goff, 1989).

It seems worthwhile to determine the expectations held by families whose children are underrepresented in gifted education. This kind of inquiry could reveal the issues that deserve attention when providing parent education for diverse groups (Strom, Bernard & Strom, 1989). The study we will describe examined childrearing differences of Hispanic

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and Anglo parents of potentially gifted young children. We sought to determine the specific areas of strength shared by both parent groups as well as the realms in which one or the other group held inappropriate perceptions about child development. The resulting profiles are being used to shape a program that takes into account the unique needs of the participating families.

## METHOD

### Parent and Child Selection

The 69 adult subjects in this study are parents of potentially gifted four-to-eight year olds who had been chosen to participate in a summer institute. These 28 Hispanic and 41 Anglo men and women live in a rural area of the southwestern United States. Nearly 40 percent of them qualify as low income; the remainder classify as middle income. Their 35 sons and 33 daughters were scheduled to enter prekindergarten ( $n=9$ ), kindergarten ( $n=15$ ), first grade ( $n=13$ ), second grade ( $n=14$ ) or third grade ( $n=17$ ) in the fall. The youngsters were selected from the total population of their age group in the district. An identification process was developed to maximize inclusion of boys and girls from homes traditionally underrepresented in the district's existing program for gifted students serving grades three through six.

Most four and five year olds in the community were administered Dial-R, a standardized screening instrument that facilitates the identification of young children at either end of the continuum of readiness skills who may be in need of additional services (Mardel-Czudnowski & Goldenburg, 1983). This measure samples more than thirty separate behaviors representative of children from ages two through six and reports norms by age for motor, language, and concept development. It was anticipated that this forty-minute test battery would help identify children whose performance was indicative of potential giftedness. Oral directions are brief and most of the items allow for visual demonstrations. Staff members administered the test in Spanish for children who could not respond to English instructions.

Preschoolers were selected for participation in the summer institute when the total score and concepts subscore surpassed the 95th percentile for their age and ethnic status. Previous usage of Dial-R permitted establishment of percentile cut-off scores for non-white subjects. Letters of explanation and invitation were sent to parents of the boys and girls identified in this phase of the screening process. Twenty-four of the thirty youngsters selected enrolled in the summer instructional program.

The screening procedures for children in kindergarten through second grade were slightly different than those used with preschoolers. Selection criteria for the school age group were used to develop a matrix that included teacher rating scores, creativity scores, and also ethnic and economic status. With the support of the school administration, all kindergarten, first and second grade teachers in the district rated every child in their classes on a thirty-item scale modified from the Renzulli-Hartmann (1971) inventory, to include items descriptive of Hispanic children and of five to eight years olds. Likert-type ratings

were assigned to each student for each item: 4 for very much like the student; 3 for like the student; 2 for not much like the student; 1 for not at all like the student; and 0 for no information available. Students whose total score was in the upper quartile of their class were assigned the highest rating of 5 for this screening dimension. The procedure was intended to adjust for any variations that might occur as a result of teachers' differing standards in making judgements. In this way we were able to identify a group of students whose behaviours were rated highest by each individual teacher.

Creativity scores were also considered. A figural subtest of the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking was administered to all children in kindergarten through second grade (Torrance, 1974). Students with scores in the upper quartile were assigned the maximum number of points for the creativity dimension. Use of this criteria matrix resulted in the selection of 45 students, 41 of whom later enrolled in the summer institute. Three additional children from more distant sites were included on the basis of parent or teacher nomination. Collectively, the child participants represented ten per cent of all five-to-eight year olds in the school district.

### **Assessment of Parents**

The relationship between individual parents and their potentially gifted child was assessed by the Parent as a Teacher Inventory (PAAT). This Instrument, translated in twelve languages, is recommended by the federal government for family intervention studies (Strom, 1984). At the outset of the five week summer program at least one parent for more than 90 per cent of the children responded to the Parent as a teacher inventory in either English or Spanish. PAAT contains statements describing parents' desires and expectations for their child, ways of interacting with the child, and the actions they take in response to certain child behaviors.

PAAT items are clustered into five areas of parenting that correspond to key domains of child development. The creativity subset reveals parental support for child fantasy and imaginative functioning. A frustration subset seeks to identify disappointments which parents experience because of expectations that are inconsistent with a child's developmental needs. Feelings which outline the scope of child control that parents require is dealt with in the control subset. The play subset discloses parental understanding of this activity as an influence on child growth. A final subset on teaching-learning reveals parental self impression of ability to facilitate the child's intellectual development.

Ten items, designed to measure each of the five subsets, make a composite PAAT of fifty items. Each item offers four possible answers: strong yes, yes no, strong no. If parents have no doubt about a statement, they are directed to circle strong yes or strong no. Otherwise, they are asked to circle yes or no to indicate the direction of their feelings. Scoring the inventory calls for assigning each item a value of 4,3,2, or 1. The most desired responses based on principles of child development are valued 4, with diminishing values assigned to other responses on the basis of their distance from the desirable answer. Subtotals are derived by summing the values assigned each of the ten items respectively for the creativity, frustration, control, play, and teaching-learning subsets. The PAAT total score represents the sum of all five subsets.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Parent Strengths and Needs

The self report scores of mothers and fathers on the parent as a Teacher Inventory were examined to assess overall performance of each parent group. Table 1 indicates that the total scores for Anglo (146.13) and Hispanic (135.94) parents exceeded the absolute mean of 125 which is used to distinguish between favorable and unfavorable performance. Similarly, for most subsets, both parent groups scored above 25, the absolute mean which differentiates favorable and unfavorable or lentations. More specifically, the greatest strength of Anglos was in the teaching-learning ad play subsets while the control subset represented their weakest area. Hispanic parents did best on the play subset and least well on the creativity subset. Anglo parents scored significantly higher on the creativity, control, and teaching-learning subsets as well as on the total PAAT score.

**Table 1** COMBINED AND SEPARATE MEAN SCORES FOR PAAT SUBSETS AND PAAT TOTAL

Subset	Anglo/Hispanic	Anglo	Hispanic
Creativity	26.95	27.78	25.92**
Frustration	27.55	27.76	27.30
Control	26.21	27.13	24.86**
Play	30.32	30.92	29.54
Teach/Learn	30.81	32.54	28.32**
<b>Total</b>	<b>141.84</b>	<b>146.13</b>	<b>139.94**</b>

\*\*Significant at .001

Childrearing profiles drawn from PAAT results provide parents and curriculum planners with comparative overview of success for each of the fifty items. Each profile contains the items restated in a positive and abbreviated form to facilitate feedback sessions with individual parents. Further analyses of mean scores for the combined and separate parent groups permitted identification of specific PAAT items that distinguish between parent groups. These items which reflect significant differences as determined by t-tests identify mutual strengths and shared needs as well as any differentiated strengths and needs of the separate groups. Such items should be take into account when deciding the content for a parent program. Item mean scores above 2.5 are interpreted as favorable perceptions. Scores between 2.5 and 3.0 are categorized as slightly favorable, and those above 3.0 as highly favorable.

### Creativity Subset

This subset is concerned with acceptance and support of child behaviors that promote higher level thinking and growth of imagination. Hispanic and Anglo parents alike recorded favorable responses (scores above 2.5) to items that dealt with encouraging

children to ask questions, make guesses, engage in pretending, and experiment with problem solving. Both parent groups demonstrated unfavorable attitudes by their reluctance to express uncertainty in front of children and to provide opportunities for practice in self evaluation. Hispanic parents were more willing to let children judge their own work and allow them to solve problems independently. On the other hand, Anglo parents expressed greater support for solitary play, the free choice of playthings, long periods of play, and making up stories.

### **Frustration Subset**

Items in this subset focus on specific aspects of childrearing that are sources of annoyance for parents. Hispanic and Anglo parents responded favorably in terms of tolerating the noise and disorder of play, paying attention to children when they show off, and encouraging them to make their fears and anxieties known. Hispanic parents showed greater inclination to accept their child's invitation to play together and they were more willing to allow interruption by a play partner during interactive pretending. There was mutual approval by the parent groups for letting children play with lots of toys. The Common impatience with persistent questions from children shows a lack of recognition that such inquires represent a healthy curiosity to explore the unknown.

### **Control Subset**

The issues in this subset focus on the willingness of parents to share decisionmaking with their child. High levels of agreement between parent groups were noted in readiness to share dominance during family play, allowing children to disagree with adult, and permitting children to do more talking than grownups during family conversations. Anglo and Hispanic parents reported favorable perceptions for seven of the ten items. They also had some unfavorable attitudes in common. There was reluctance to let children speak when adults are talking, and to permit continued play when peer conflict occurs. Anglo parents scored higher on items honoring the children's strength of imagination, permitting talk about any topic, condoning secrets, and encouraging personal decisionmaking

### **Play Subset**

Hispanic and Anglo Parents considered play to be a highly favorable activity for children. They agreed that: boys and girls need playtime with their parents as well as with agemates; family play can improve child behavior and language; and youngsters will respect adult family members who play with them. There was general willingness to play with children and parents reported themselves to be comfortable participants in fantasy play. However, Hispanics took a slightly more favorable stance in both of these areas. Most mothers and fathers expressed confidence in their own ability to select appropriate toys and to remain interested during play with children. Both groups underestimated how rewarding the process of play is for children but Hispanics offered a more favorable view of its value. Anglo parents provided a more positive speech model by not imitating children during conversations with them.

### **Teaching-Learning Subset**

Anglo and Hispanic parents held favorable attitudes about the conditions that promote learning and recognized their obligations to offer instruction. They felt capable of using

toys for teaching, providing a supportive environment, and increasing child maturity through interactive fantasy play. Anglo parents were more aware of the potential for learning in the preschool years, expressed greater confidence in being able to evaluate child learning, to respond to their child during play, and considered it unacceptable for their child to have an imaginary playmate. They were also less likely to feel that personality development during childhood occurs mostly through observation.

### **Academic Gains for Children**

This report focuses primarily on identifying curriculum needs of parents but it is also worthwhile to acknowledge how the child participants were influenced by involvement in the summer institute. Project staff members wanted to know the extent to which students identified as potentially gifted by the selected screening instruments would have been identified by other external measures. Efficacy of the identification procedures was analyzed by comparing results with those obtained on certain subtests of the Structure of Intellect (SOI). The SOI Reasoning Readiness test was administered to prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade students ( $n=37$ ) while the SOI Process and Diagnostic test was administered to the entering second and third grade students ( $n=31$ ).

A major goal of the institute was for children to participate in activities designed to enrich their skills in cognition, convergent and divergent thinking, creativity, problem solving, and education. The SOI served as a pre test and post test for assessment of programme effectiveness. Its focus on clusters of thinking abilities and patterns of strengths and weaknesses provided a basis for planning both general and individual curriculum activities. This approach to curriculum planning, developed by Meeker (1974), is based on the thesis that children differ in the kinds of intelligence they are able to demonstrate. For example, disadvantaged Hispanic students may be gifted in memory and figural ability (Meeker & Meeker, 1973). Superior abilities in these areas might go undetected as giftedness on IQ measures. Since most of the SOI indicators are tests of thinking ability (processes) rather than knowledge (content) as in IQ or standardized achievement tests, gifted culturally diverse students are more likely to be identified (Meeker, 1985).

With respect to efficacy, 21 of the 37 four-to-six year olds obtained gifted scores in at least five of the ten subtests on the SOI Reasoning Readiness test; 14 scored in the gifted range on three or four of the subtests. Similar findings were recorded for the older children; 24 of 31 students scored as gifted on at least five of eleven subtests; three more students scored as gifted on at least three subtests.

When the summer institute ended, all 68 youngsters were retested with the appropriate SOI subtests. Table 2 shows that the prekindergarten to first grade group made significant gains in their abilities to reason with figures and words as measured by the Reasoning Readiness test. The memory, cognition, and evaluation skills of these children also improved significantly. For the entering second and third graders, significant gains were made in abilities to process figural and symbolic information as well as cognition and convergent skill production skills (see Table 3.)

**Table 2** REASONING READINESS SCORES FOR 37 PREKINDERGARTEN TO FIRST GRADE STUDENTS: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE BY SOI DIMENSIONS

SOI Dimension	Pre-test	Post-Test	F-test	p-value
Figural Abilities	31.86	39.17	10.74	.002*
Symbolic Abilities	10.28	11.31	1.02	.32
Semantic Abilities	22.53	25.47	11.01	.001**
Memory Abilities	4.86	6.89	4.69	.04*
Cognition Abilities	36.44	41.56	8.84	.003*
Convergent Abilities	16.17	18.86	2.48	.12
Evaluation Abilities	7.19	8.64	6.81	.02*

\*Significant at .05

\*\*Significant at .001

**Table 3** PROCESS AND DIAGNOSTIC SCORES FOR 31 SECOND AND THIRD GRADE STUDENTS: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE BY SOI DIMENSIONS

SOI Dimension	Pre-test	Post-Test	F-test	p-value
Figural Abilities	50.56	59.50	11.14	.001**
Symbolic Abilities	89.31	111.50	4.48	.04*
Semantic Abilities	35.00	38.26	3.61	.08
Memory Abilities	23.09	23.29	1.28	.26
Cognition Abilities	51.47	57.42	5.76	.02*
Convergent Abilities	87.91	112.23	5.79	.02*
Evaluation Abilities	12.69	13.61	1.47	.23

\*Significant at .05

\*\*Significant at .001

### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

For some time educators have recognized the influence of self concept on learning and success. It is also known that parents have greater impact on children's self esteem than anyone else (Strom, Bernard, & Strom, 1989). Accordingly, it is important that the attitude of parents toward their role as a child's longterm teacher should be favorable and include reasonable expectations. This study permitted the identification of shared perceptions as well as unique strengths and needs of Hispanic and Anglo parents of potentially gifted children. Although there was a high degree of homogeneity on 21 of the 50 PAAT items, Anglo parents demonstrated appreciably more favorable perceptions on the creativity, control, and teaching-learning subsets.

Favorable attitudes were shared by both parent groups in accepting children's imagination, tolerating the disorder of fantasy play, and recognizing the need for youngster to play with parents as well as peers. Hispanic parents were more inclined to join children at play, expressed a higher level of comfort during these periods together, and assigned more importance to the play process as an influence on child development. Anglo parents were more inclined to promote creativity by encouraging imagination, guessing, inventing stories, making allowances for extended periods of play, and arranging for solitary play (Strom, 1981). They reported less frustration with the noise and disorder of play, and offered their children greater encouragement to express fears and anxieties. Other Anglo

strengths included more support for decisionmaking, greater willingness to accept learning failures, and more favorable perceptions of their ability to provide and evaluate learning experiences at home.

Overall, the Anglo and Hispanic parents in this study supported many of the needs associated with gifted child development. In order to help parents overcome the obstacles they most often experience, this program emphasizes growth in these areas for both parent groups: (a) ability to express uncertainty in answering questions from children, (b) willingness to allow play with toys traditionally reserved for the opposite gender, (c) helping children acquire and practice methods of self evaluation and conflict resolution, (d) tolerance for inopportune and persistent questions raised by young children, (e) recognizing the relationship between child task commitment and support for pretending, and (f) developing a respectful attitude toward child participation in conversation with adults.

The program also emphasizes growth in these specific areas for Hispanic parents: (a) willingness to arrange solitary play and long periods of pretending, (b) encouraging children to acquire and practice decisionmaking skills, (c) skills in evaluating learning, responding to children during play, and using adult language during parent child interaction, (d) support for expression of imagination such as making up stories, and (e) awareness of the parent role in facilitating early learning for children.

The investigation demonstrated the worthwhileness of the Parent as a Teacher Inventory in distinguishing childrearing expectations for specific subpopulations. It also permitted the development of differentiated curriculum to fit the needs of parents from diverse background while honouring their unique strengths.

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