Book Review: Identifying Academically Talented Minority Students, by David Lohman (2006)

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Topics related to the identification and education of underrepresented students have become more and more common in the scholarly literature over the last several years. In addition, the monographs *Overlooked Gems* (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2008) as well as the *Achievement Trap* (Wyner, Bridgeland, & Diiulio, 2007) have both devoted substantial time and effort to describing the plight of gifted and talented students from low-income families. In addition to students from low-income families, those from Hispanic, African American, and Native American backgrounds are also under-nominated and under-represented in programs for the gifted and talented (Yoon & Gentry, 2009). This issue of students from certain income and racial/ethnic groups being disproportionately represented in gifted and talented programs is one of the greatest challenges facing the field.

Despite a great deal of effort being devoted to the topic, few manuscripts have devoted as much detail and practical applications toward solving the problem as a 2006 monograph by David Lohman entitled *Identifying Academically Talented Minority Students*. In this monograph, Lohman addresses many topics with regard to underrepresentation. Although this review cannot reproduce the information provided in the 58-page monograph, one point in particular is worth discussing in detail.

One of Lohman's chief arguments is that a major barrier to proportional identification is that large-scale standardized tests, even when used and used correctly, often involve national norm comparisons. He explains that such comparisons might be useful for establishing how well a student or a school is performing compared to the rest of the country, but such a comparison is less useful in making classroom or program placement decisions since the individual school of interest is unlikely to emulate the same characteristics of the tests' normative sample. Put more simply, Lohman (2006) gave the example of the 5% of American schools whose average achievement test score is around 95% when compared to the rest of the nation. In this setting, national norms do very little in telling an educator which students are in need of special services. However, when students in schools are compared to each other, educators are better suited to make decisions about instructional placement. In this case, the gifted and talented classes might involve only students in the top .5% when compared to national norms, but in the top 25% of the local school population. Lohman's argument is thus that the more specific the norm group used for comparison, the better. This is true for groupings such as income, race/ethnicity, as well as school or grade-level groups. The use of narrowly defined comparison groups allows educators to see which students are achieving or have the potential to achieve given similar background and circumstances.

Lohman's (2006) monograph is not a simple read, but instead involves an incredibly in-depth discussion of why the field of gifted and talented education is having such trouble reaching proportional representation and how we can proceed toward such a goal in a more productive fashion. He also provides multiple examples of how several common cures (e.g., nonverbal tests) have failed to solve the problem. No other scholarly piece has looked so honestly at the field while at the same time offering practical suggestions for improvement, such as the combining of multiple measures in a multiple-pathways format to allow for the most accurate identification (and example datasets are provided). The Lohman monograph is a well-written and well-conceived piece that should be read by every person concerned with the education of gifted and talented students. ❖

References

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