


## Chapter 21

# The Home and Community Connections Model: Shifting the Power From Teacher Differentiation to Learner Personalization

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### ABSTRACT

*A major myth of gifted education is the idea that gifted and advanced learners should already possess the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in rigorous learning experiences. This myth reinforces the underrepresentation of historically marginalized groups in gifted programs, as the institution does not value or recognize how they demonstrate knowledge. This chapter addresses that misconception by constructing differentiated learning experiences using students' home and community pedagogies. The Home and Community Connections Model authentically responds to the strengths, talents, and interests of each learner by purposefully designing classroom opportunities that value these areas. This chapter defines the prompts of the Home and Community Connections Model and demonstrates how they can be integrated into classroom instruction. The activation and recognition of potential through students' home and community assets create the access points for equitable educational experiences that challenge deficit-minded beliefs and misconceptions.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Consider the following vignette:

A professor asked their students, who are currently enrolled in a graduate level teacher preparation program, to draw a picture of a gifted learner (Manzone, 2020). Their picture was to be accompanied by descriptors of characteristics exemplified by their version of this type of learner. The students were given five minutes to complete this assignment. They were then broken into small groups to debrief and uncover patterns of myths, misconceptions, stereotypes, biases, and racism highlighted in their pictures. The following list is a synthesis of their descriptors:

- Gifted learners are white, middle-to-upper-class children.
- Gifted learners are good at everything. They could not possibly have a learning disability.
- Gifted learners are well dressed and compliant. They come to school ready and excited to learn.
- Gifted learners do not need instruction because they already have the readiness and prerequisite skills necessary to be successful.
- Gifted learners demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the same way.
- Gifted learners are high-performing, always turn in their assignments, and score well on class projects and assessments.

The most dangerous and false myth surrounding the characteristics of giftedness is the belief that gifted and talented children constituted a single and homogeneous group (Borland, 2021; Ford, 2013; Reis & Renzulli, 2009). Students with gifts and talents exist in all cultural, racial, ethnic, and economic groups. Gifted services should reflect this diversity, yet they do not, and they have not for decades (e.g., Bonner & Goings, 2019; Davis, 2010; Ford, 2013; Grantham, 2004; Whiting, 2009). Since the 1960's, research has documented the underrepresentation of students of color in gifted programs (Ford 1998; Grisson, Rodriguez, & Kern, 2017). Student identification rates for participation and services for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students remain significantly lower than their White and Asian peers (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, et al., 2019; Wright, Ford, Young, 2017). 3,635,533 students are missing from gifted services in the United States (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, et al., 2019). Of those missing, 771,728 (73.60%) are Black, 18,741 (71.53%) are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 1,164,363 (66.41%) are Latinx, and 44,663 (63.25%) are American Indian or Alaskan Native (Gentry, Gray, Whiting, et al., 2019). Factors such as the teacher referral process, biased testing requirements, and “deficit perspectives of school personnel” contribute to the continued inequity surrounding access to gifted services (Sewell & Goings, 2020, p. 112). The patterns uncovered in the assignment described above highlight the ubiquitousness of a deficit mindset, and how explicit and implicit bias permeates aspects of identification, services, and perceived abilities of diverse gifted and advanced learners.

The National Association for Gifted Children (2018) defines giftedness as “students with gifts and talents who perform -- or have the capability to perform -- at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment in one or more domains” (p. 1). The word *potential* in the NAGC definition is critical. Traditional models for gifted education tends to be exclusive rather than inclusive, providing services for learners *after* a student has been formally identified (Jarvis, 2009). Students demonstrate their abilities, receive a formal identification, then gain access to appropriate services. The NAGC definition reflects a shift in value from *performance* to *potential*. Under this paradigm, gifted education has a dual purpose: (a) to respond to documented advanced performance levels in learners, and (b) to

uncover and nurture hidden potential (Jarvis, 2009; Renzulli & Reis, 2021). This approach to giftedness focuses on students' assets in contextually-specific content areas, and how knowledge is demonstrated in culturally authentic ways. Services for gifted learners build opportunities through culturally sustaining and responsive curriculum design. Teachers function like talent scouts, strategically and purposefully creating learning experiences that engage and excite students *before* they are identified (Reis, Gentry & Park, 1995; Renzulli, 1994). When schools systematically nurture talent and potential in all learners, they create the conditions to challenge deficit thinking and access. The use of curriculum as a catalyst for the emergence of talent is an asset-based approach to gifted education that benefits diverse learners, and expands the population of students who receive services (Reis, Gentry, & Park, 1995; Renzulli, 1994; Siegle, O'Rourke, Langley, et al., 2016).

Challenging deficit thinking in the field of gifted education requires an analysis of the concepts of giftedness, the identification process, the delivery methods for services, and the access to opportunities for underrepresented and historically marginalized learners. The first three factors are critical, yet are beyond the scope of this chapter. This chapter proposes an instructional model that educators can use to create asset-based learning experiences *inside* the general education classroom. The *Home and Community Connections Model* differentiates a learning experience by directly capitalizing on students' funds of knowledge from their home and community. The model is based on a twofold premise: (a) that a learning experience created using home and community connections gives rise to students' aptitudes, talents, and strengths, and (b) that the integration of home pedagogies provides opportunities for personalization within a learning experience. The model extends existing research (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014; Delgado Bernal, 2001; 2002; Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti, 2005; Yosso, 2005) on instructional validation and integration of culturally and linguistically diverse gifted learners. The goal of this chapter is to articulate how classroom instruction can be reoriented to directly connect with students' home and community to acknowledge and value the potential in diverse gifted learners.

The remainder of this chapter will address the following driving question: *How can K-12 teachers use students' home pedagogies as the means of differentiation to acknowledge talent and nurture potential in diverse gifted learners?*

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The concept of asset-based pedagogies is not new (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). For over twenty five years, classroom teachers, school site counselors, and university faculty have argued the importance of valuing students strengths. Asset-based pedagogies are defined as methods of instruction that place value on who students are -- their language, their funds of knowledge, their cultural wealth, their talents, and interests (Flint & Jagers, 2021; Yosso, 2005). A core feature of asset-based pedagogy is the belief that students' have multiple identities, which are fluid rather than static (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Identities are reshaped as students engage in learning experiences, accumulate new understandings, and interact with new problems and people (Subera, Vujasinovic, & Esteban-Guitart, 2016). The concept of identity also applies to giftedness and to services for diverse gifted learners. Static notions of giftedness view ability as a fixed entity. A fixed view of giftedness reinforces a deficit perspective and the dominant ideology that has systematically blocked access to gifted services for children who have not had equitable access to experiences and opportunities (Grissom, Rodriguez, & Kern, 2017). For example, children who have experienced poverty, racism, and social discrimination are more likely to be left out of gifted services

### ***The Home and Community Connections Model***

when access is determined by static measures like intelligence tests (Ford, 2014; Ford, Collins, Grantham, et al., 2021). Conversely, when giftedness is seen as a fluid “amalgamation of expandable behaviors,” it helps teachers recognize the gifts and talents in diverse gifted learners (Jarvis, 2009, p. 237). When teachers implement instructional pedagogies that value student’s strengths and actively foster talent, they build the opportunities necessary for diverse students to demonstrate potential.

Teacher expectations and the opportunities they provide for students to display their abilities, giftedness, and talents *matter*. Implicit and explicit biases and static conceptions of giftedness perpetuate a deficit approach to instruction and opportunity for diverse gifted learners. Teachers’ perceptions of students as “disadvantaged,” impact the learning environments they create and the access they provide to content in the classroom (Ford, Collins, Grantham, et al., 2021). Challenging deficit mindsets related to diverse gifted and talented learners requires a two pronged approach that addresses both deficit thinking and deficit access.

- *Deficit thinking* occurs when teachers ignore, devalue, or dismiss the pedagogy from the home or community. What students bring with them from the home and community is not recognized, valued, or utilized as access points to differentiate learning experiences in the classroom.
- *Deficit access* impacts identification and learning experiences. Deficit access to identification occurs when the school system (a) does not provide, (b) provides disproportionate access, or (c) provides limited geographic access to multiple and varied pathways to services for advanced and gifted and talented learners. Deficit access to learning experiences restrict participation for some learners based on a perceived lack of interest, ability, or readiness level.

The *Home and Community Connections Model* is founded on Delgado Bernal’s (2001; 2002) seminal work on pedagogies of the home. Pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001; 2002) represent the communications, traditions, values, and learning that occur in the home and the community that have historically gone unrecognized by educational institutions. Home learning also refers to the creation of a “space of belonging” within a classroom and the opportunity to authentically and purposefully discuss issues of social justice (Garcia & Delgado Bernal, 2021, p. 592). This philosophical orientation is predicated on the belief that learning happens everywhere, and that the family and community are student’s first and most important teachers. As students participate in classroom experiences, they bring with them cultural knowledge and language from the home. Deficit thinking occurs when teachers do not recognize, value, or respond to the lived experiences students bring. Delgado Bernal (2001; 2002) argues that knowledge from home must be more than recognized by classroom teachers. Home knowledge must be valued and directly employed within a learning experience. Teachers must actively solicit home learnings from students, strategically construct their lesson plans around the strengths and cultural wealth that students bring, and deliberately seek out the talents and potential of these learners (Delgado Bernal, 2001; 2002; Yosso, 2005). Instructional opportunities should be designed to target assets and opportunity must address pedagogies of the home and community. The prompts of the *Home and Community Connections Model* actualize this approach to learning.

The *Home and Community Connections Model* addresses deficit thinking and access for diverse gifted learners by its spill-over properties. The spill-over effect is defined as an instructional strategy that benefits all learners in some way (Kaplan, 2004). This approach to instruction acknowledges that modifications to the curriculum made for gifted learners have the potential to positively impact all students. This philosophical orientation to curriculum and instruction is not an altruistic attempt to

view every student as gifted. It is an approach to instruction based on inclusivity and access. The *Home and Community Connections Model* is a spill-over strategy for all learners. The model differentiates instruction for diverse gifted learners via their home pedagogies. The model provides all learners with the opportunity to display their potential and talents in ways that are culturally authentic. A major goal of the model is to uncover the hidden potential in diverse gifted learners. When potential is actualized, it challenges teachers’ perceptions of the learner, and by extension, deficit views of giftedness.

The theoretical orientations described above have been translated into classroom practice via the *Home and Community Connections Model*. Table 1 synthesizes how the theoretical orientations impacted the construction of the *Home and Community Connections Model*.

*Table 1. The impact of theoretical foundations on the home and community connections model*

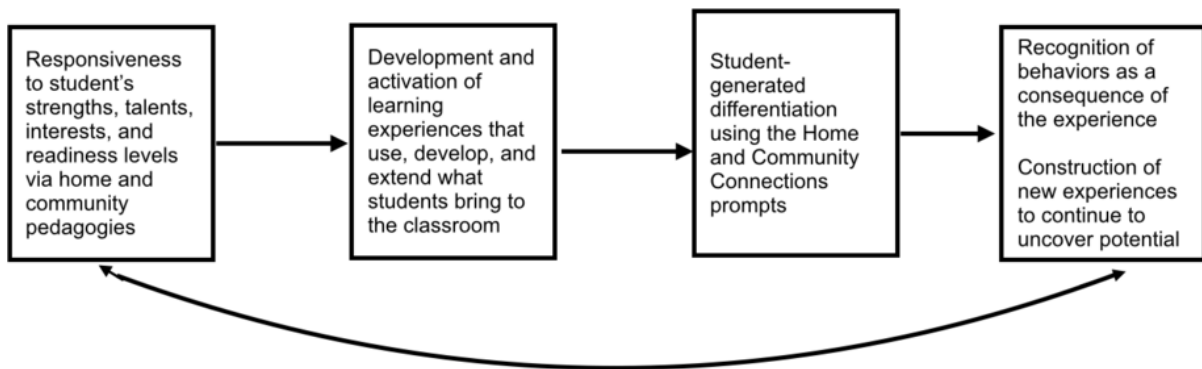
Theoretical Foundations	Impact on the <i>Home and Community Connections Model</i>
Pedagogy of the Home and Community	The relationship between formal and informal learning experiences The recognition, value, and direct integration of students’ funds of knowledge and home learning in classroom experiences The belief that differentiation begins with the assets students bring from their home and life experiences The belief that the goal of any learning experience should be the personal connections students make between themselves, their community, and the content The belief that authentic, asset-based learning experiences must be culturally connected and culturally sustaining The inclusive approach to instruction that views all students as competent, talented, and unique members of a classroom that can demonstrate their understanding using a variety of options
The Spill-Over Effect	The belief that rigorous instruction should be differentiated and available and accessible to all learners in some way The belief that an open-ended approach to constructing learning experiences promotes creativity, inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving in all learners (National Association for Gifted Children, 2019) The belief that all learners have the right to develop and display their potential via rigorous, engaging, and relevant experiences The belief that instruction should be adaptive to meet the changing and developing needs of the learner The ability to make rigorous modifications to the curriculum using students’ strengths and interests to create opportunities for all learners

## THE HOME AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS MODEL

Teacher bias is one of the biggest barriers to the identification, recruitment, and services of diverse learners in gifted programs (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Sewell & Goings, 2019). Challenging deficit thinking and access for diverse gifted learners requires a shift in current instructional practices. Diverse learners should be provided with instructional opportunities that cater to their strengths, that differ from their typical classroom experiences, and that promote individual identity and agency (Ford, 2013). The framework for the *Home and Community Connections Model* is analogous to the 1989 Kevin Costner movie *Field of Dreams*. If you build it, they will come. If students are provided with instructional opportunities to display their gifts and talents within the context of their home and community funds of knowledge, they will. If teachers build rigorous and culturally authentic pathways within a learning experience based on pedagogies of the home and community, students will demonstrate characteristics that have historically been unnoticed, unchallenged, or unvalued in the general curriculum (Ottwein, 2020). Figure 1 represents the instructional pathway of the *Home and Community Connections Model*.

## The Home and Community Connections Model






Figure 1. The home and community connections model framework



The *Home and Community Connections Model* begins with the philosophical belief that students bring knowledge with them from their home and community. This knowledge can be used as the basis for developing new understandings in the classroom (Delgado Bernal, 2001; 2002; Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti, 2005). Teachers begin the design of any learning experience by strategically and purposefully reorienting the content so that it can be authentically accessed through the lens of learners' interests, needs, and abilities, and funds of knowledge. Teachers then activate the learning experience with culturally authentic resources and products that provide students with many and varied ways to demonstrate potential. A key step in the integration of the *Home and Community Connections Model* is the transfer of responsibility for differentiation from the teacher to the learner. Students use the model to personalize the experience, to create their own parallel pathway (Tomlinson, 2014) for exploration within the teacher-created experience. As students engage in generating personalized meaning from the content, teachers watch for moments of talent, expressions of ability, and sparks of interest. Teachers document these displays of potential and replicate the conditions under which they occurred in future learning experiences. Repeated access to challenging curriculum and authentic learning opportunities are critical if perceptions held by teachers about the capabilities of diverse gifted learners are to change (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012).

The *Home and Community Connections Model* is activated through a series of prompts. The prompts function like a menu of options that allow students to respond to content through a personalized, home pedagogies lens. The selection and application of the *Home and Community Connection* prompts is not to be assumed by the classroom teacher. The response to the prompts is determined by the student within the context of their cultural and linguistic strengths, talents, and interests. This separates the teacher from making assumptions about the student's funds of knowledge and their home or community. It also places control of the instructional experience in the hands of the student. This shift in power is the difference between student-centered and learner-centered instruction (Handa, 2019). In student-centered instruction, the teacher makes decisions for the learner based on what they think is needed. Conversely, in learner-centered approaches to instruction, teachers co-construct the experiences with the students, drawing on their "unique perspectives, talents, and capacities" (Handa, 2019, p. 103). The prompts that comprise the learner-centered *Home and Community Connections Model* are defined below.







Table 2. The home and community connections prompts

Prompt Name and Visual Icon	Description of the Home and Community Connections Prompt
<p>Communication Structures</p> 	<p>This prompt refers to the <b>methods, means, and structures</b> that <b>families and communities</b> use to communicate. Structures of communication can include <b>verbal, non-verbal, and written</b> modalities and <b>impact</b> the way that students <b>send and receive messages</b>. This prompt examines how <b>different modes of communication vary</b> between <b>cultural groups</b> and impact <b>how a student participates</b> in any situation or context.</p>
<p>Cultural Elements</p> 	<p>This prompt encompasses the <b>beliefs, rules, knowledge, rituals, collective identities and memories</b> of a <b>family or group</b> of people. This prompt focuses on <b>valuing and recognizing</b> the cultural elements that make each student unique. Students can examine the <b>cultural elements</b> that create the <b>range of diversity</b> in the classroom and world, as well as <b>patterns of overlap between and across groups</b> of people.</p>
<p>Communal Philosophy</p> 	<p>This prompt refers to the <b>intentional variables a family or community shares</b>. These variables can include <b>resources, interest, beliefs, and values</b>. This prompt acknowledges that various <b>communities</b> have <b>different philosophical orientations</b> that impact how they interact with the world. Students can <b>examine</b> their own <b>philosophical beliefs</b> and the <b>degree</b> to which they are <b>similar and/or different</b> from others.</p>
<p>Historical Perspective</p> 	<p>This prompt refers to the <b>influence of time</b> on history; on the <b>culture, heritage, families, and people</b>. This prompt helps to <b>contextualize</b> the <b>treatment</b> of a <b>family, community, or group</b> of people <b>over time</b>. The <b>impact</b> of that <b>treatment</b> at the <b>individual, communal, national, and global level must be examined</b>.</p>
<p>Social Development</p> 	<p>This prompt refers to the relationship <b>individuals</b> have with the <b>world around them</b>. The concept of <b>multiple group memberships</b> is <b>critical</b> to the examination of this prompt. <b>Students</b> are simultaneously <b>members of multiple social groups</b>: peer groups, family groups, religious groups, sports teams, etc. Each <b>group contributes</b> to a different piece of <b>students' social and developmental identity</b>. This prompt also <b>examines</b> the <b>controversies</b> that arise when <b>different social groups</b> have <b>conflicting and competing points of view</b>.</p>

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**The Home and Community Connections Model**

Table 2. Continued

Prompt Name and Visual Icon	Description of the Home and Community Connections Prompt
<p>Political Point of View</p> 	<p>This prompt refers to the <b>political affiliations</b> and <b>orientations</b> of <b>students</b> and their <b>families</b>. This prompt recognizes that a <b>students’ political perspective</b> is <b>impacted</b> and <b>influenced</b> by <b>multiple groups</b>: their familial group, their peer group, their social media group, etc. This prompt recognizes that how we <b>view</b> and <b>respond</b> to issues is <b>inextricably linked</b> to our <b>individual</b> and <b>familial political point of view</b>.</p>
<p>Artistic Contributions</p> 	<p>This prompt refers to the <b>scope</b> and <b>influence</b> of the <b>artistic works</b> and <b>contributions</b> of <b>families</b> and <b>communities</b>. Art can take <b>any medium, form, or function</b>. This prompt examines the <b>seminal</b> and <b>contemporary relationship</b> between <b>art and culture</b>. This prompt also highlights how art both <b>reflects</b> and <b>projects people</b> and <b>their ideas</b>. It is important to note that this prompt is interested in examining the <b>art created by all people</b> within a <b>community</b>, not just as pieces hanging in museums.</p>
<p>Collective Action</p> 	<p>This prompt refers to the <b>actions</b> taken by a <b>family member</b> or <b>community</b> in service of an <b>intended outcome</b> or <b>objective</b>. These actions can be in <b>response to</b> both <b>internal</b> and <b>external stimuli</b>. For example, a family or community can take collective action to help an ill member, or to rally around an issue of social injustice experienced by many. This prompt examines <b>both the action taken</b> as well as <b>the motives or reasons</b> for that <b>action</b>.</p>
<p>Traditions Over Time</p> 	<p>This prompt focuses on the <b>customs</b> and <b>beliefs passed down</b> over generations between <b>family members</b> and <b>community groups</b>. This prompt examines not only the customs of families, but the <b>symbolic or special meanings</b> of those <b>customs</b>. The <b>relationship</b> between <b>seminal</b> and <b>contemporary family traditions</b> is inherent in this prompt.</p>
<p>Linguistic Contributions</p> 	<p>This prompt focuses on the <b>vernacular</b>, <b>syntax</b>, <b>words</b>, and <b>phrases</b> used by students and their families. This prompt <b>values</b> the <b>language</b>, <b>dialect</b>, and <b>expressions</b> indicative of a specific family or community. Language also refers to the <b>relationship</b> between the <b>home language</b> of the family or community and its <b>uses in various contexts</b>.</p>
<p>Thinking Process</p> 	<p>This prompt refers to the <b>strategies</b> that <b>individuals</b> and <b>families</b> use to <b>solve problems</b>. The <b>integration</b> and <b>juxtaposition</b> of <b>new knowledge</b> with <b>previously learned understandings</b> is a major <b>focus</b> of this prompt. This prompt <b>examines</b> the conditions under which students and their families <b>synthesize</b> and <b>apply</b> knowledge and skills in <b>various contexts and situations</b>. This prompt highlights the idea that <b>different cultures</b> and <b>families solve problems</b> in <b>various ways</b>.</p>



Learning experiences must not only be relevant and responsive to learners' needs, but culturally sustaining in the community from which knowledge is being developed (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). The *Home and Community Connections* prompts serve as a valued resource students can use to respond to the content being taught. The model provides students with the language to make connections to the content based on their own strengths and talents. The *Home and Community Connections Model* activates potential in diverse gifted learners. It is a culturally relevant, sustaining, inclusive strategy that teachers of any grade or subject-matter can implement to directly challenge the deficit beliefs that block access to gifted programs for diverse learners.

## DIFFERENTIATION VIA THE HOME AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS MODEL

### Student-Centered Differentiation

Responding to the *individual* needs of learners has always been considered “good practice” in the classroom. However, how often is this done in a way that integrates the home and community? The recognition and response to learners' needs, interests, and abilities is defined as *differentiation* (Tomlinson, 2001; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2012; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). Differentiation is not an algorithm or a series of prescribed and predetermined steps. It is a “heuristic model” for classroom practice that examines the intersection between variables like classroom environment, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and learners' needs (Tomlinson, 2015, p. 203). Curricular and instructional differentiation is accessed through three major variables: content, process, and products (Maker, 1982; Tomlinson, 1999). *Content* refers to what is taught and what students need to learn. Differentiating how students gain access to the *content* can be accomplished through varying the complexity and rigor of questioning strategies (Tomlinson, 1999). *Process* refers to instruction or to the opportunities students are provided to engage with the content and make sense of it for themselves. *Process* differentiation can take the form of tiered activities, inquiry-based pedagogies, and the integration of supplementary resources. *Products* are the assessments that occur at critical points in a learning experience. The purpose of *product* differentiation is to help students reveal what they know, understand, and can do related to a topic (Tomlinson, 1999). *Products* can be differentiated through the use of multimodal assessments that target different types of intelligences. Differentiation for gifted learners is the “deliberate modification” of the curriculum (*content*), instruction (*process*), and assessment (*product*) based on the unique needs of advanced thinkers (VanTassel-Baska, 2015, p. 81).

Differentiating curriculum for gifted learners should be accomplished using practices that provide the “optimal match” between the access points of content, process, product and students' interests and aptitudes (VanTassel-Baska, 2017, p. 63). Teachers begin the differentiation process by examining the needs of the learners as they relate to the intended learning outcomes for the experience. Questions, resources, and tasks can be created that provide a range of modes and modalities for students to access that content and demonstrate what they have learned. The differentiation of content, process, and product in a learning experience creates a variety of access points necessary for not only gifted and advanced learners, but all learners. Table 3 provides an example of how questions, resources, and products can be differentiated for gifted learners in a typical learning experience or unit of study. For the purpose of this example, the content under study is an elementary school unit on communities.

**The Home and Community Connections Model**

Table 3. Student-centered differentiation framework

Content Differentiation through Questions	Process Differentiation through Resources	Product Differentiation
How do rules help or hinder changes in communities? In what ways do rules impact groups of people differently? What ethical issues exist in how rules are constructed and enacted in communities?	Many and varied websites Photographs (timelapse, first-person sources) Newspaper articles (current events)	Analyze patterns of communities over time in the United States. Compare the patterns of U.S. communities to those located around the world.

Although differentiation via content, process, and product generates rigorous learning experiences for all learners, it alone is not enough to challenge deficit thinking and deficit access for diverse gifted and talented students. Differentiation must be used in a more personalized and inclusive manner that starts not with the content, process, or product, but with the home and community pedagogies of the learner. Tomlinson (2015) argues that “teachers must persistently seek to understand each student’s culture, interests, strengths, needs, approaches to learning, perspectives, and contributions” (p. 205). The creation of personalized, culturally sustaining, and responsive pathways accomplish two goals: (a) to respond to the gifts and talents that students have previously demonstrated, and (b) to create opportunities for untapped potential to be exposed, uncovered, and maintained. The *Home and Community Connections Model* can be explicitly and purposefully integrated into the seminal features of differentiation to create culturally authentic opportunities for diverse gifted learners.

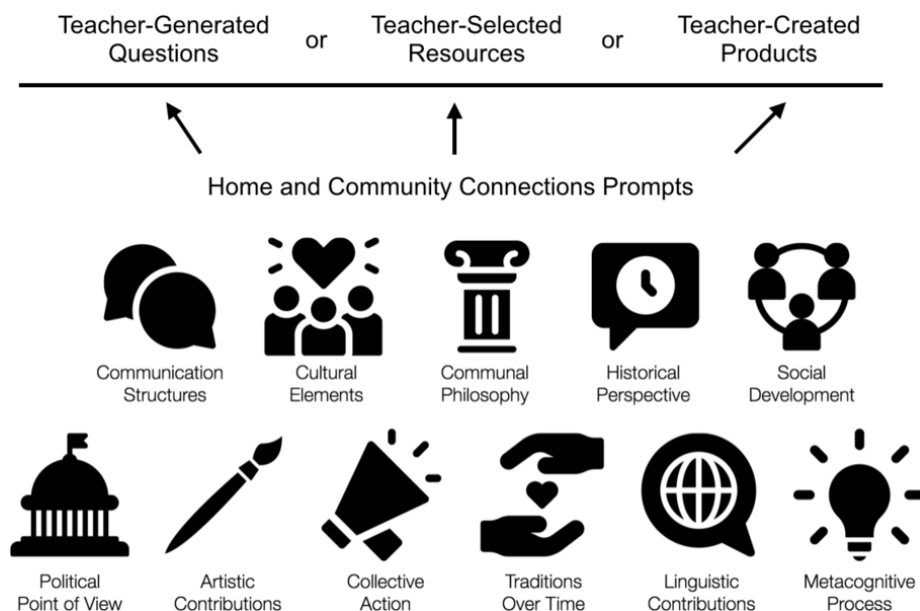
**Learner-Centered Differentiation via the Home and Community Connections Prompts**

Modern conceptions of giftedness recognize that the characteristics that reflect talent are impacted, either positively or negatively, by the education system (Callahan & Azano, 2021). This view of giftedness in the education system addresses the fact that factors outside the learner’s control influence the opportunities they have to demonstrate their talents and abilities. The *Home and Community Connections Model* is a learner-centered differentiation strategy that builds *opportunities* for students to display their talents and abilities. These opportunities are created by strategically and purposefully bridging students’ home and community with the core content. The *Home and Community Connections Model* helps students integrate the prompts into teacher-created learning experiences via three access points: (a) teacher-generated questions (content), (b) teacher-selected resources (process), and (c) teacher-created products. The integration of the *Home and Community Connections* prompts helps students personalize the original differentiation variables in ways that honor their talents and showcase their abilities. Figure 2 provides a visual representation for the access points to integrate the *Home and Community Connections* prompts into any learning experiences.

When differentiation is applied in the general education classroom, often the only modifications made are to the content (Brevik, Gunnulfsen, & Renzulli, 2017). Teachers typically adjust the pacing of the lesson or present more advanced content to gifted learners. Neither of these modifications addresses home pedagogies as an instructional tool to acknowledge talents and abilities. The prompts of the *Home and Community Connections Model* function as personalized lenses by which students can uniquely tailor any learning experience and expand the options for differentiation in the classroom. Figure 3 pro-

vides an example of the personalized pathways that can be formed through the integration of the *Home and Community Connections* prompts into general differentiation access points. As students engage in self-selected, culturally sustaining opportunities, teachers previously held conceptions of diverse gifted learners are challenged, enabling “a shift in how students are seen” (Swanson, 2016, p. 188).

Figure 2. Access points for intersecting the home and community connections prompts









The classroom example in Figure 3 highlights how learner-centered differentiation leads to asset-based, opportunities-driven instructional experiences. In a typical classroom, students are presented with differentiated experiences based on the perceptions and decisions of the teacher. Teachers drive differentiated instruction based on a combination of assessment results and “variations in student learning needs and interests” (Goddard, Goddard, Bailes, et al., 2019, p. 201). The *Home and Community Connections Model* changes the way differentiation is structured in the classroom. Students, rather than the teacher, modify content, resources, or products based on their own abilities and talents. Students respond to content and tasks based on how they see the world, how they reference their funds of knowledge, connect to their interests, and leverage strengths to solve problems. If we are to challenge deficit thinking in the classroom and provide opportunities for diverse gifted and talented learners to demonstrate their potential, instruction must shift from student-centered differentiation to learner-activated experiences. This shift in power creates a dynamic interaction between the student and their environment. Dynamic environments help uncover potential and foster talent in diverse learners (Blumen, 2021). The process for creating dynamic, learner-centered environments is not prescriptive or exact. The *Home and Community Connections* prompts can be applied in any manner that can be justified and substantiated based on the degree to which:

**The Home and Community Connections Model**

- The prompts help the content relevant to the lives of the learners
- The prompts reinforces an already established interest, talent, or skill set
- The prompts provides students with an opportunity to explore new interests and demonstrate strengths and talents in culturally authentic ways
- The prompts facilitate the use of inclusive, culturally relevant resources
- The prompts provides for the alternative and authentic creation of products and assessments

Figure 3. Classroom example of differentiating using the home and community connections model

Original Elements of Differentiation	Original Teacher-Created Differentiation	Home and Community Connections Personalized Pathway #1	Home and Community Connections Personalized Pathway #2
Teacher-Generated Content Questions	<p>How do rules help or hinder changes in communities?</p> <p>In what ways do rules impact groups of people differently?</p> <p>What ethical issues exist in how rules are constructed and enacted in communities?</p>	<p>Student A addressed the question using the <b>social development</b> prompt. </p> <p>They examined how rules in communities facilitate or hinder the <b>social development</b> of children their own age.</p>	<p>Student B addressed the question using the <b>collective action</b> prompt. </p> <p>They examined how rules enacted in a community contributed to recent <b>collective action</b> movements.</p>
Teacher-Selected Resources	<p>Websites</p> <p>Photographs</p> <p>Newspaper articles</p>	<p>In addition to the resources provided, Student A addressed the questions and task through the <b>politics</b> prompt. </p> <p>They examined legal case law and statutes for laws in their local community.</p>	<p>In addition to the resources provided, Student B addressed the questions and task through the <b>linguistic contributions</b> prompt. </p> <p>They used explored testimony from legal experts.</p>
Teacher-Created Product	<p>Analyze patterns of communities over time in the United States.</p> <p>Compare the patterns of U.S. communities to those located around the world.</p>	<p>Student A addressed this task by examining <b>cultural elements</b>. </p> <p>They examined ancient and modern communities determine how <b>cultural elements</b> have impacted communities over time.</p>	<p>Student B addressed this task by analyzing <b>artistic contributions</b>. </p> <p>They examined patters of communities over time through the <b>artistic contributions</b> of its members.</p>

**PAUSE AND REFLECT**

The *Home and Community Connection Model* is predicated on culturally sustaining teacher decision-making and student voice in the classroom. Challenging deficit thinking and access requires the courage, flexibility, and nimbleness to modify instruction based on the needs of learners. Challenging deficit access requires the use of curricula that value the funds of knowledge they bring to the classroom and view students as co-constructors of the learning experience (Handa, 2019). The use of a powerful, culturally authentic curriculum enables students’ talents and abilities to be revealed, valued, and sustained within the context of their home and community (Swanson, 2016). Table 4 provides a series of guiding questions that teachers can use to reflect on their process and make instructional decisions regarding the integration of the *Home and Community Connections* prompts into learning experiences. Questions are

## The Home and Community Connections Model

provided for students to develop agency and voice in activating their funds of knowledge. As students learn to reflect on the alignment between their strengths, talents, home, community, and the conditions of the learning experience, they begin to create individualized and personalized pathways.

Table 4. Questions for reflection before, during, and after a learning experience

Placement in the Learning Experience	Teacher Reflective Questions	Student Reflective Questions
Before the start of the learning experience	What are my students' interests in school, at home, and in the community? How can I help guide students to use the prompts to make connections between the content and their home and community? What are current events and community issues that are important to the lives of my students? How can I use students' home and community to bring relevancy, responsiveness, and sustainability into my unit of study? How can I use the <i>Home and Community Connections</i> prompts to highlight and recognize the abilities and potential of all learners?	What are my personal strengths and how can I activate them with the <i>Home and Community Connections</i> prompts? How can I use the <i>Home and Community Connections</i> prompts to bring my interests into the learning experience? What is something I want my teacher to know about who I am as a person and scholar? What <i>Home and Community Connections</i> prompts could be brought into this experience that would help me feel "seen" and valued?
During the execution of the learning experience	How are my students engaging with the <i>Home and Community Connections</i> prompts in the learning experience? What additional prompts can be added in-real-time to create additional challenge pathways? What potential, talent, and interests are students demonstrating as a consequence of this lesson? How are the <i>Home and Community Connections</i> prompts creating opportunities for students to demonstrate abilities and potentials? What behaviors or characteristics of giftedness am I observing as students engage in this experience?	What is my level of interest thus far in the learning experience? What additional <i>Home and Community Connections</i> prompts could be brought into the lesson to make it more interesting for me? What are my preferred modes of accessing content and how can I use the <i>Home and Community Connections</i> prompts to engage in personal research? Do the resources/materials used thus far in the lesson reflect my identity and culture? If I was planning this lesson, what materials would I use? Has the lesson been challenging to me thus far? What <i>Home and Community Connections</i> prompts could be used to make the lesson more appropriate to what I can do?
After the learning experiences has concluded	In what ways was I able to meet the intended learning outcomes through an asset-focused lens? What pathways were most successful in this learning experience? What <i>Home and Community Connections</i> prompts made it effective for my learners? What talents, strengths, and characteristics of giftedness were displayed by my students in this experience? What did I learn about my students as a consequence of this experience? How can I use that knowledge to create future learning experiences?	What was something new I learned as a consequence of this experience? How did this experience use one or more of my strengths or talents? What is something new I am interested in learning more about as a result of this lesson? What could have been done differently so that I could have had a better experience? What is something I know about the content that I did not have the opportunity to demonstrate in this lesson?

The strategic and targeted implementation of the *Home and Community Connections* prompts alter the differentiation paradigm. The model begins the construction of any learning experience with direct connections to students home and community. This approach to instruction is philosophically different from one that pre-determines what knowledge should be valued and how knowledge should be constructed (Delgado Bernal, 2001; 2002; Freire, 1972; Giroux, 1983). The *Home and Community Connections Model* renders typical differentiated tasks and questions incomplete. Although student-centered differentiation

### ***The Home and Community Connections Model***

strategies vary the access to the content based on the content, process, or product (learners academic needs), they stop short of truly challenging deficit thinking by integrating the culture of the learner into the construction of knowledge. Authentic differentiation must also integrate the home pedagogies of the learner and the “factors related to the production of social capital” (Renzulli & Reis, 2021, p. 348).

## **CONCLUSION**

The deficit thinking paradigm surrounding culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse gifted learners is deeply ingrained in the general system of education (Mun, Ezzani, & Lee, 2020). Students’ inability to display their potential in the classroom is incorrectly attributed to their own cognitive or motivational failures, as opposed to a failure of the system to recognize their home and community as a source for the construction of knowledge. A students’ success in the classroom is directly impacted by their teachers’ willingness (and ability) to provide a curriculum that uses culturally and academically responsive practices (Ford & Trotman Scott, 2013). A shift from deficit thinking to an assets-based paradigm requires both intention and effort from teachers and administrators. Instructional pedagogies must focus on students’ culture, linguistic abilities, interests, and strengths. When authentic learning experiences are created in the classroom, it lowers the risk of “perpetuating a flawed system of inequality” for historically underserved and marginalized populations (Bianco & Harris, 2014, p.169).

Assets-based models of curriculum and instruction are unique in that they provide targeted opportunities for students to investigate, develop, and display their talents, abilities, readiness levels, and interests (Stebbleton, Soria, & Albecker, 2012). A major objective of an assets-based curriculum is to provide gifted and advanced learners with the knowledge and skills necessary to take ownership over their potential -- to empower and motivate students to generate and sustain their own interests and capitalize on their own aptitudes. The implementation of the *Home and Community Connections Model* for diverse gifted and advanced learners capitalizes on students’ strengths, and honors students’ home and community. This learner-centered approach to differentiated instruction requires intentional focus on the part of the teacher. Teachers must critically examine their own curriculum and challenge the status quo regarding the opportunities they provide for students to utilize their funds of knowledge and various identities in the classroom (Kaplan & Mora-Flores, 2021). School districts, administrators, and educators committed to teaching for opportunity, to challenging a deficit mindset, and promoting access for diverse gifted and advanced learners via *Home and Community Connections* must address the following in regards to learner-centered curriculum and instruction:

*Teachers must be willing to challenge deficit-based assumptions about how diverse gifted and advanced learners demonstrate their abilities:* Students display their talents, interests, knowledge, and skills in different ways that are influenced by their cultural backgrounds, funds of knowledge, and lived experiences (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). The underrepresentation of diverse learners in gifted programs is a result of stereotypes and misconceptions held by teachers about what diverse learners know and can do (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Giftedness exists among all demographic and socioeconomic groups. Opportunities must be created within the curriculum for diverse gifted and advanced learners to display their potential, develop their talents, and make connections to their various identities. Formal identification must no longer be a prerequisite to tailored and differentiated instruction.

*Teachers must be willing to monitor their own progress in challenging deficit thinking via purposeful, asset-based modifications to their instruction:* This requires teachers to constantly examine their own explicit and implicit biases and to acknowledge how that bias impacts their curricular and instructional decisions. Monitoring requires teachers to view themselves, as well as their students, as “cultural beings” (Wynter-Hoyte, Braden, Rodriguez et al., 2019, p. 431). When teachers recognize and value the backgrounds and home pedagogies of diverse gifted and advanced learners, they begin to use students’ identities to construct experiences that reflect the cultural and linguistic needs of the learners.

*Teachers must be willing to acknowledge that static and singular forms of assessment perpetuate systems of inequity within a classroom:* Traditional forms of assessment fail to consider the readiness levels and prior life experiences of diverse gifted and advanced learners (Mun, Hemmler, Langley, et al., 2020). The structure and means of assessment in a curriculum must be adjusted to enable students to view content and demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter through a cultural lens (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Non-traditional assessments should provide students with opportunities to investigate real-world problems in authentic contexts and produce meaningful, action-oriented products. The addition of multi-modal assessment methods into the curriculum for gifted and advanced learners showcases students’ academic abilities, capitalizes on their strengths, and values the cultural wealth they bring to every learning experience.

VanTassel-Baska (2021) asserts that instruction for the gifted should focus on the development of potential through “advanced instructional models that promote elaboration and evidence of higher-level reasoning” (p. 451). The authors of this chapter agree. They were motivated to write this chapter because they believe in the spill-over effect both philosophically and pragmatically. They believe in the notion that engaging curriculum, the development of potential, and the sustainment of interests are components of instruction that should be made available to *all* learners. They believe that an assets-before-deficit approach to instruction embodies the spill-over effect and is necessary if educators are to challenge deficit thinking related to gifted learners at the classroom level. The authors also wrote this chapter as a call to action. Differentiation through an asset-based, inclusive lens that connects to the home and community is valuable for every student. All students should have classroom experiences that connect with their funds of knowledge, honor their home and community, align with their interests, activate creative thinking, and offer chances to nurture and demonstrate talents. The spill-over effect is happening in schools and districts across the country, but it is happening as a trickle, one classroom at a time. Challenging deficit thinking and deficit access requires a deluge.

Consider the following analogy. Every year, the Nile river floods the banks of the Ethiopian Highlands. Witnessing this event from afar, many people see it only as a destructive force. In actuality, it is a point of growth, a chance for rebirth, and a necessary means of sustaining the resources of the region. The same is true with services for gifted learners. Many people see the spill-over effect and the creation of opportunities for *all* within a classroom as a challenge to the status quo in gifted education. A destructive force that “obliterates the distinctiveness of gifted instruction,” thereby diminishing its value (Kaplan, 2004, p. 48). The authors of this chapter do not align with that perspective. Curriculum once thought to only be held in reserve for already identified gifted learners can “spill-over” and positively affect all students. Just like the flooding of the Nile, this deluge does not destroy gifted education. The authors argue that it does the opposite. Flooding the classroom with *Home and Community Connections*, asset-focused experiences for all learners increases the reach of gifted services. It provides an opportunity

### ***The Home and Community Connections Model***

that benefits historically marginalized students. It challenges and disrupts the deficit thinking and deficit access that has perpetuated the field of education for far too long.

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