

Igniting Potential: Identity-Affirming Gifted Education for Children of Color

Dr. Peggie Burnett-Wise, Ed.D.

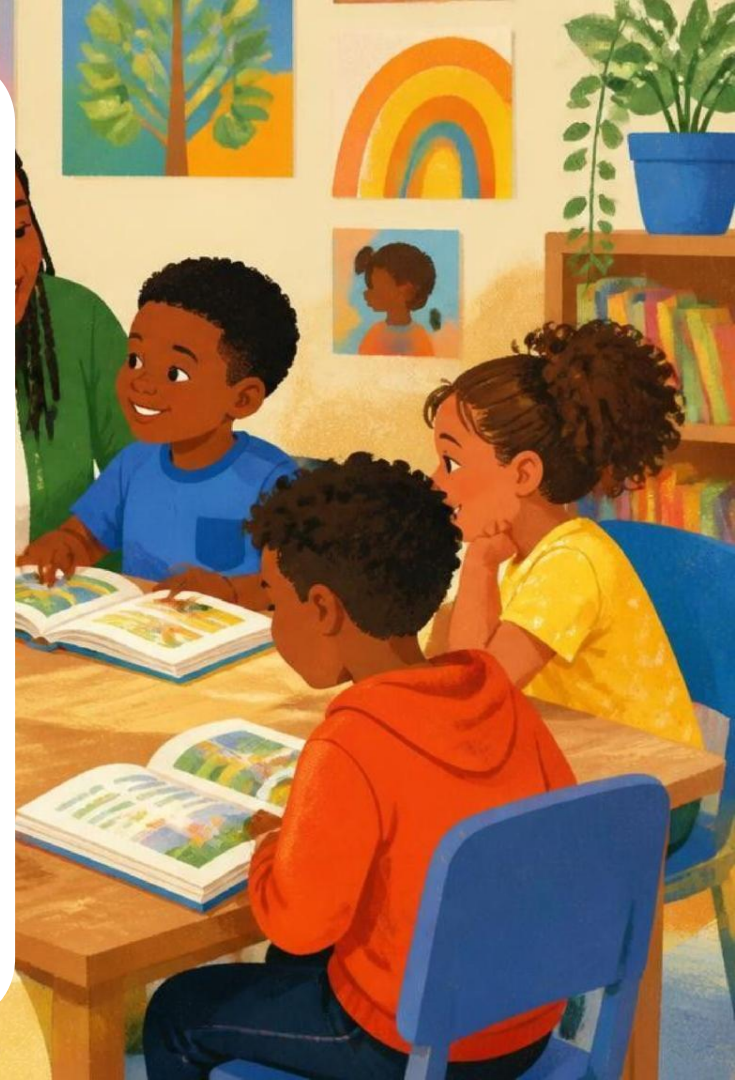
Visiting Assistant Professor and Program Director, M.A. in Instructional Leadership, Roosevelt University

Founder, Wise Leadership Consulting | Founder, Uhuru Shule

IAGC 2026 Annual Conference | Wednesday, October 21 | Room 164



Slides and readings, live now:
wiseleadershipconsulting.org/iagc/slides



Welcome. Let's See Who Is in the Room.

Everything I show you is at wiseleadershipconsulting.org/iagc/slides. **Want PD hours?** Check in now on the IAGC Connect app.

RAISE YOUR HAND IF YOU ARE HERE AS A:

LEADER

principal, coordinator,
administrator, coach

TEACHER

classroom teacher, gifted
specialist, instructional coach

PARENT

caregiver, community partner,
advocate

REFLECT

Look around. Every one of these roles
shapes whether a gifted child of color
is seen.

OUR FOCUS

For the next hour, hold one gifted child of
color in mind. A student, your own child, a
child you once taught. We will come back
to that child.



The Moment I Knew

When my son read his first picture book at six months old, I knew two things.

01

He was profoundly gifted.

02

And the system was not built to see him.

I was scared for him. That tension shaped my career moving forward.

QUOTE

"The day he was assessed by a white, female school psychologist was a career changer for me."

Donna Y. Ford, *Black Enterprise* (2016)

The Assumption We Need to Name

CONTEXT

As a CPS principal, I proposed the first Regional Gifted Center on the West Side of Chicago.

RESISTANCE

The resistance I met was telling. Many assumed we wanted more White students, not Black and Brown ones.

THE CORE

That assumption is the problem this session confronts.



Two Truths

TRUTH 01

Giftedness is not synonymous with any race or ethnicity.

TRUTH 02

General education, as currently structured, does not support gifted learners, particularly gifted learners of color.

Most of our programs accommodate gifted children of color.

This hour is about affirming them.

The Urgency Is Documented

THE DISPARITY

Up to
771,728

Black students estimated missing from gifted identification in 2016.

(Gentry, Whiting, & Gray, 2024)

EVIDENCE-BASED SOLUTION

**Screen every child,
and more are found.**

One large urban district screened every second grader, with the same eligibility standards. It saw large increases in low-income students and students of color placed in gifted programs.

(Card & Giuliano, 2016)

Who Gets Noticed?

TEACHER STORY

"They can read."

A new special education teacher I coached told me that about several of her Black, low-income kindergartners, in an under-resourced school on Chicago's West Side.

THE CONTRAST

Their test scores said emerging kindergarten.

The teacher noticed.

The test did not.

SLIDO PROMPT

In your setting, how does a child get noticed, and who decides? Answer in Slido.

Four Questions We Will Answer Together

1

QUESTION 1

How do I know if my school affirms or isolates gifted children of color?

2

QUESTION 2

What is the difference between accommodation and affirmation, and why does it matter?

3

QUESTION 3

What does Culturally Relevant Pedagogy actually look like inside a gifted setting?

4

QUESTION 4

What does a replicable, identity-affirming model look like in practice?

Question 1: Do We Affirm or Isolate?

Grounded in Donna Ford's cultural isolation framework, four questions help us see it:

1

QUESTION 1

Who is in the room?

2

QUESTION 2

Whose culture is on
the walls?

3

QUESTION 3

Whose knowledge
is in the curriculum?

4

QUESTION 4

Who feels like they
belong here?

PAUSE & REFLECT

Think of one gifted child of color you know. Which question makes you pause?

Question 2: Accommodation Is Not Affirmation

Accommodation

"You can be here."

Accommodation adjusts the seat. It is tolerance.

Affirmation

"This place was built for you."

Affirmation redesigns the room. It is transformation.

"When deficit thinking exists, educators are unable to focus on the strengths and potential of Hispanic and African American students; they are blinded, instead, by low expectations and stereotypes."

Donna Y. Ford, *Gifted Child Today*, 33(3), p. 32 (2010)

Name one thing your program does for gifted children of color. Does it adjust the seat, or redesign the room?

Question 3: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in a Gifted Setting

Gloria Ladson-Billings' three tenets, all three, not one:

1

TENET 1

Academic Success

High expectations, rigorous content, no ceiling for any child.

2

TENET 2

Cultural Competence

Students learn through and about their own culture. Identity is an asset, not an obstacle.

3

TENET 3

Critical Consciousness

Students learn to question, challenge, and change the world.

REFLECT & ACT

Ask yourself: which tenet is weakest where you work or parent?

Question 4: An Identity-Affirming Model in Practice

I will not promise you a plug-and-play model, because one does not exist.

Uhuru Shule, and how it travels:

Parent-led → family voice in design

A Black male teacher → mirrors and hiring

Community partners → compacting and acceleration

Gifted at three and four → above-grade goals

I decided to sunset Uhuru Shule as an operating school: discernment, not retreat.

It was a laboratory. What it taught now lives in my coaching, consulting, research and publishing.



Your Sphere of Influence

You are here as one of three people. Each sphere has its own leverage.



LEADER

Leverage: System

Look at who referred your last identified group, then pilot screening every child in one grade.



TEACHER

Leverage: Practice

When a child shows you more than the scores do, write it down and nominate them.



PARENT

Leverage: Voice

Put it in writing: "Please screen my child for gifted services. Here are three things I have seen them do."

IN PRACTICE

A new special education teacher asked me, "Once they met the IEP goals... what do you do?"

Update the goal the moment a child passes it. Don't send a child into next year with last year's goals.

Table Talk: 12 Minutes

Your one goal: leave this table knowing what you will do differently, and for which child.

1 MIN

name your sphere.

8 MIN

go deep on one question below.

3 MIN

post your change in Slido.

01

Think of a gifted child of color you know. Is their school affirming or accommodating them? What would need to change?

02

Apply the four questions to your school, classroom, or home. Which one makes you most uncomfortable, and what does that tell you?

03

Where in your sphere do you have the most untapped leverage right now?

04

What is the one obstacle preventing you from acting? Is it real, or is it habit?

What Did We Hear?

Three tables, one change each, and the child it will impact.

We are not looking for the best answer. We are looking for honest ones.

01 TABLE 1

ONE CHANGE

Identified practice or policy shift from this table.

IMPACTED CHILD

The specific student or profile affected.

02 TABLE 2

ONE CHANGE

Identified practice or policy shift from this table.

IMPACTED CHILD

The specific student or profile affected.

03 TABLE 3

ONE CHANGE

Identified practice or policy shift from this table.

IMPACTED CHILD

The specific student or profile affected.

ON SCREEN

Your one change, and the child it's for.

Be ready to share your table's focal commitment as we go around the room.

What We Did Not Get To

An hour opens more questions than it closes. Three we only touched today:

01

How do we keep gifted children of color once we find them?

02

What does affirmation look like at home, from the earliest years?

03

How does a school or district change who gets noticed?

SLIDO

Leave the question you did not get to ask in Slido.

Slides and readings are live now. A follow-up note comes Friday.

One Sustainable Change

"Awareness, honestly held, is where transformation begins."

REFLECTION

Are you accommodating, or affirming?



Thank You. Let's Talk.

Dr. Peggie Burnett-Wise, Ed.D. | peggie@wiseleadershipconsulting.org

ACCESS RESOURCES

Slides, readings, and Parent Circle access:

wiseleadership consulting.org/iagc/slides



SCAN QR CODE

Live now

Point your phone camera to get the slides and readings.

FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

The Parent Circle

A monthly virtual group supporting families of gifted and high-potential children from birth to age 14.

UPCOMING SESSIONS

Free Meet & Greet: **Monday, November 2**

First Circle: **Saturday, November 7**

References

Selected academic research, foundational texts, and literature cited in this work.

PUBLICATIONS A–F

Card, D., & Giuliano, L. (2016). Universal screening increases the representation of low-income and minority students in gifted education. *PNAS*, 113(48), 13678-13683.

Ford, D. Y. (2010). Underrepresentation of culturally different students in gifted education. *Gifted Child Today*, 33(3), 31-35.

Ford, D. Y. (2013). *Recruiting and Retaining Culturally Different Students in Gifted Education*. Prufrock Press.

Ford, D. Y. (2016, March 9). My son's gifts sent me back to school. *Black Enterprise*.

Ford, D. Y., & Moore, J. L. (2024). Educators of gifted and talented students must be formally trained. *Theory Into Practice*, 63(1), 28-37.

Ford, D. Y., & Tyson, C. A. (2024). Preparing educators to decolonize children's literature. *Gifted Child Today*, 47(1), 74-78.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Herder and Herder.

PUBLICATIONS G–L

Gentry, M., Whiting, G. W., & Gray, A. M. (2024). Systemic inequities in identification and representation of Black youth. *Urban Education*, 59(6), 1730-1773.

Grisson, J. A., & Redding, C. (2016). Discretion and disproportionality in gifted education. *AERA Open*, 2(1).

Hines, E. M., Ford, D. Y., et al. (2023). Good trouble, necessary trouble: Adding culture to GT programs. *Roeper Review*, 45(3), 150-160.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.

Long, D. A., McCoach, D. B., Siegle, D., et al. (2023). Inequality at the starting line. *AERA Open*, 9.