

Shona culture of Zimbabwe's views of giftedness

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In an exploratory study designed to investigate Shona culture of Zimbabwe's views of giftedness, data were collected from sixteen Zimbabwean academics of Shona cultural background. Using questionnaire narratives, the study established that Shona culture views giftedness as an unusual ability blessed in an individual through ancestry which enables him/her to perform with unparalleled expertise even in challenging domains. The hallmarks of Shona culture's views of giftedness are ability to succeed, solve problems, creativity, interpersonal relationships and spirituality. When values are held constant, Shona culture's views of giftedness do not differ from views in contemporary psychology. The study recommends fusing together cultural and modern views of giftedness in the school curriculum in order to develop a diversity of talents in students.

Despite consensus that giftedness manifests in all racial and cultural groups (e.g., Florey & Tafoya, 1988; Kokot, 1992; Stone, 2003), its definition and tools for identifying gifted children have of late aroused more debate and controversy than consensus, let alone unanimity. The central issue has been and still is defining the relationship between giftedness and intelligence. As observed by Baldwin (2004), positions held in the twentieth century varied, but shifting from the IQ paradigm of viewing intelligence to define giftedness more broadly has been quite difficult. In this scenario, some researchers subscribed to 'great divide' theories as gospel truth (Segall *et al.*, 1999). As noted by Ford and Grantham (2003), Gould (1981) demonstrated how racial sentiments led to '... conscious fraud ... dishonest and prejudiced research methods, deliberate miscalculations, convenient omission, and data misinterpretation ... in studying intelligence' (p. 86).

Poortinga and Van de Vijver (2004) note that 'great divide' theories seek to split the world by categories like race to explain differences in cognitive functioning. A case in point is Lévy-Bruhl's (1926) infamous proposition that non-Western thought processes were pre-logical cognition based on collective representations of shared

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mystical and religious beliefs. However, Poortinga and Van Vijver note that such theories were not based on empirical evidence but were derived from mere assumptions. Unfortunately such assumptions have done more harm than good in the education of gifted culturally diverse students. According to Ford and Grantham (2003), those assumptions are responsible for reinforcing theories of deficit thinking and negative stereotypes about diverse cultural and racial groups' intelligence. Discrimination and segregation of language minority students in tracking programs can be blamed squarely on deficit thinking.

The need for a paradigm shift in defining giftedness

The under-representation of language minority students in predominantly European-American gifted education programs has brought to question the validity of the traditionally acclaimed standardized psychometric tools of measuring intelligence and giftedness. Limitations of IQ tests in measuring potential beyond the traditional schoolhouse giftedness domain are now more apparent than ever in the light of the increasing dominance of the 'Theory of Multiple Intelligences' (Gardner, 1983, 1993) and recognition of cultural influences on intelligence (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) notions of the bell curve are criticised for not understanding eco-cultural influences on a child's mental growth (Baldwin, 2004).

Most nations today are culturally diverse, including Zimbabwe, the focus of this study. Therefore the search for consensus in defining the construct of giftedness cannot ignore cultural views of giftedness held by each respective cultural group.

The debates on definition of giftedness and identification of gifted students

As noted by Gardner (1993), IQ definitions of giftedness originated from the pioneering work of early psychologists of intelligence such as Spearman and Terman who conceived of intelligence as a general factor ('g') for conceptualization, abstract reasoning and problem-solving. They theorized that intelligence could be quantified. This put IQ on the map in measuring intelligence and elevated it to a position of dominance in defining giftedness. But Gould (1995), in *The mismeasure of man*, amply demonstrated the limitations of IQ. Gardner (1993) concurred that standardized tests have been abused, with little theoretical advance. Gardner scoffs at claims like 'Culture Free Test' as unfounded. IQ tests are heavily biased in favour of White Anglo-American middle-class students in North America. Consequently diverse minority students, notably African-American, Native-American and Mexican-American, have a slim chance of being selected into North America's gifted and talented education programs (Mitchell, 1984; Romero, 1994). Similarly, students from Aboriginal populations in Australia (Forbes-Harper, 1996) and the Maori population in New Zealand (Moltzen, 1999) also face problems of under-representation in gifted education programs. While culturally diverse students are under-represented in gifted programs, Cathcart (1994) maintains, 'Similar numbers of exceptionally able

children are found in all races and cultural groups' (p. 184). It is therefore clear that the problem is essentially how we define and measure giftedness in students.

On the Sub-Saharan African scene, studies by Kathuria and Serpell (1999) carried out among Zambian children using '*Panga Muntu*' (design a person), a local standardized test, showed that reliably measured intelligences among African children were not related to school success. Studies by Sternberg *et al.* (2001) on practical intelligence among the Luo children of Kenya revealed a reliability scale of .60 but results failed to correlate with academic intelligence as measured by Raven's Progressive Matrices. Similarly, Grigorenko *et al.* (2001) established that what was considered intelligent among the Luo adults of Kenya did not correlate with teachers' perceptions of intelligence. Meanwhile, in the same sub-region, Ngara's (2002) study found teacher's perceptions of giftedness among primary school children to be academically based. There must be some kind of potential which is not realized and developed in school, yet is useful and acknowledged in communities. School definitions of giftedness and intelligence are therefore limited in scope from the point of view of indigenous perceptions of human potential. One cannot agree with Mpofu (2002) more on the need for indigenizing the psychology of human intelligence with reference to the training of teachers in the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

In the Zimbabwean context, previous studies (e.g., Mpofu, 1994; Mpofu & Watkins, 1994), established no racial bias of results on imported ability tests when Zimbabwean Black and White students in urban areas were compared. But when applied to rural students, the scales showed a bias in favour of urban students. Compared to students in North America and the UK, Mpofu observed that, generally, Zimbabwean students performed slightly below. While issues of language command also come in, Mpofu concluded that Western developed mental ability scales might have limited applicability in Zimbabwe. At present the use of foreign intelligence test scales has been suspended in Zimbabwe. Since students' intelligence is difficult to measure or, when reliably measured, seems to be unrelated to activities of schooling, it therefore follows that any potential outside the traditional scholastic domain is not recognized and developed in school.

Despite inconsistency and lack of consensus on the definition of giftedness and tools for identifying gifted students, Ford and Grantham (2003) note that most definitions of giftedness and intelligence are still IQ-based and test-driven, purporting that a gifted person has an IQ of 130 or higher. Even those schools that boast of using multiple criteria still base 50 per cent of the total scores on IQ tests in making placement decisions. Hence, Ford and Grantham scoff at a matrix of criteria as 'pseudoscientific, a smokescreen' (p. 220). Even within the same racial group, Renzulli (1978), proponent of the Triad Model definition of giftedness (that is, above average intelligence, creativity, and task commitment), argues that most creative persons come below the 95th percentile in IQ. Therefore they are not likely to be selected into gifted education programmes. Cohen (1988) noted that the IQ test basically negates cultural and linguistic differences of gifted minority students. In the Zimbabwean context under study, African students, though in the majority, face two competing cultures (indigenous African and Anglo-Western values) while the language of

instruction (English) is a second language. Zimbabwean students are as much victims of attempts to transport Western psychological notions of intelligence and technologies and attempting to apply them without considering their eco-cultural validation as are minority cultures elsewhere (Mpofu, 2004). Teacher training in Zimbabwe still relies on Western psychological conceptions of human intelligence. While tests play an important role in education and are linked to job success and promotion, an alternative point of view suggests that it is the US society which ascribes so much importance to tests (Sternberg, 2004). Whatever value tests have, Rowe (as cited in Richardson, 2003) warns against 'using tests in the same way a drunk might use a lamp post: more for support than for illumination' (p. 7).

Debate on giftedness and methods of identifying gifted students would be incomplete without mentioning key players like teachers. As noted by Ngara (2002), the teacher is a crucial factor not only in the process of identifying gifted students but s/he also '... decides what curriculum to implement, how to implement it and how to shape and assess students' total development' (p. 215). Ford and Grantham (2003) state that teachers who are not trained in multicultural education tend to have negative stereotypes of culturally diverse students' academic competence. They argue that deficit thinking attitudes render teacher referral an effective gatekeeper for preventing true identification and development of gifted language minority students' potential.

Theoretical issues

Selection into gifted education programmes by IQ mainly focuses on the linguistic and logical-mathematical domains (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Therefore, many students with high potential outside these domains are not recognized. Gardner's (1983, 1993) Theory of Multiple Intelligences provides scope for expanding our definition of giftedness and the criteria for selecting students into special programmes in a major paradigm shift. Gardner discounted the notion of a single unified intelligence and proposed relatively distinct modes of intelligence. Initially Gardner identified seven distinct forms of intelligence (i.e., linguistic, logico-mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily kinaesthetic, spatial and musical). Recently Gardner (1999a) proposed an eighth intelligence—'naturalistic' (i.e., the ability to discern patterns in nature). Gardner also speculated on the possibilities of the existence of two other forms of human intelligence, namely 'spiritual intelligence' and 'existential intelligence'. Chapman (1998–2004), however, boldly insists on the existence of the ninth intelligence—'existential intelligence'—which transcends the existential realm to include 'spiritual' or 'metaphysical intelligence' encompassing psychic powers.

In his theory, Gardner (1983, 1993) defined intelligence as 'ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued within one or more cultural settings' (p. x)—a definition silent on the origins of intelligence but acknowledging the relevance of its cultural context. From the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, we can understand how giftedness can manifest in one or more domains of intelligence in an individual and among individuals.

Gardner's (1983, 1993) theory of intelligence is widely supported elsewhere (Feldhusen *et al.*, 1997). Feldhusen *et al.*'s study, in particular, revealed ten areas of talent in which students reported their strengths. Hence, they argue that, by focusing on narrow domains such as linguistic and cognitive domains, a diversity of potential talents in students is probably going to waste.

Another useful theory which can shed light on the mystery of under-recognition of culturally diverse talents is Sternberg's (1985, 1988) Triarchic Theory of Intelligence. The Triarchic Theory of Intelligence comprises three sub-theories relating how intelligence reveals itself (i.e., componentially, experientially and contextually). Componential intelligence specifies mental functions relating to analytical and abstract reasoning reflected in IQ scores. Such individuals are likely to be selected into special programmes for gifted students. Experiential intelligence relates capacity for novelty and creativity. Such individuals, though they excel in creativity, would not normally be considered as terribly smart. Finally, contextual intelligence specifies the capacity for readily adapting to the environment. This category includes practical intelligence and the 'street smart' but they are not usually selected into gifted programmes. One can see how some gifted students from diverse cultures may be gifted in the context of intelligences in their culture, like the Chewa children of Northern Zambia and Luo children of Kenya, while this does not translate into scholastic competence (Sternberg *et al.*, 2001).

Context of Shona cultural views of giftedness

Shona culture has historical roots in Zimbabwe. Although Shona language and culture are shared with Mozambique, this study's focus was on the Shona culture of Zimbabwe's views of giftedness. Geographically, Zimbabwe is landlocked between five other Southern African states—Zambia in the North, Mozambique in the East, South Africa in the South and Botswana and Namibia in the West.

Zimbabwe is a former British colony with a colonial legacy spanning ninety years, from 1890 to 1980. Zimbabwe is culturally diverse with a population of 12 million people in the following proportions: 95 per cent Blacks and 5 per cent Whites, Asians and others. Shona is the language and culture of 80 per cent of the population while 15 per cent are from the Ndebele language and cultural group. Shona is one of Zimbabwe's three official languages, together with English and Ndebele. Zimbabwe's language policy requires students to acquire proficient literacy in two languages (i.e., English and one indigenous language, either Shona or Ndebele depending on their regions). English is the main language of instruction from about grade 4 to university. Shona is a common term for six major dialects with a common/standard orthography, namely Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika, Kore Kore, Budya and Ndau. Kalanga, though basically a Shona dialect (Karanga) with marginal linguistic influences of Ndebele language, is left out of the Shona Syllabus merely on a historical technicality.

Compared to its neighbours, Zimbabwe is relatively industrialized with agriculture as the mainstay of the economy, supported by manufacturing, mining, tourism and the informal business sector. While the market economy is fast developing, many

rural people are still subsistence farmers. About 80 per cent of Zimbabwe's population live in rural areas while only 20 per cent are urban dwellers. Most Shona urbanites have strong rural roots. Therefore Shona people have two homes. By Shona cultural definitions, your relative's home is also your home where you can visit or stay. As reported by Mpofu (2004), with the early literacy drive of the early 1980s, 'The average Zimbabwean is Black, young, literate, and of rural background' (p. 366). Two competing systems of causation are affecting Zimbabwean people's lives—indigenous cultural values and Anglophone-Western values, which, as observed by Mpofu, are both 'maligned and envied' by Zimbabweans (p. 365).

Previous studies on Zimbabwe and Sub-Saharan Africa

No studies were found in the literature to illuminate Shona or indigenous African cultural views of giftedness in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, several studies (e.g., Irvine, 1970, 1988; Mpofu & Nyanungo, 1998, Mpofu, 2004) are important in understanding the progress and effort directed towards finding eco-culturally relevant theories of intelligence for the sub-region. As reported by Mpofu, Irvine's (1970, 1988) analysis of Shona proverbs indicated that Shona intellect was characterized by dispositional intelligence (*ungwaru*), instrumental knowledge, social intelligence (*uchenjeri*) and higher-order trait dispositions. Shona dispositional intelligence reflected logical reasoning, foresight, and being rational, sceptical, vigilant, alert and cautious. Mpofu's (2002) studies, carried out among 49 Zimbabwean college students of Shona cultural background, established that 'Zimbabwean college students consider intelligence to be multilayered' (p. 6). Shona students considered intelligence to be expressed in five main areas—interpersonal relations; planning, decision-making and problem-solving; resource management and utilization; education and culture; and work and productivity. Interpersonal behaviour was highly rated, followed by being educated and knowledgeable about local culture and success in the management of resources. Sternberg (1999) noted that being successful, or practically intelligent, is cherished in communities.

In a pilot survey carried out among 49 Zimbabwean undergraduate college students of Shona cultural background from various professional backgrounds, Mpofu (2004) established a multilayered view of intelligence, that is, traditional indigenous and modern. The indigenous view of intelligence is 'expertise in interpersonal relationships' in contrast to the modern view of 'cognitive or academic success'. 'Interpersonal expertise' is recognized as social giftedness defined by Porath (2000) as 'the unusual ability to make inferences about other people's thoughts, emotions, intentions, and points of view, evidenced in nurturance of and empathic responses to others' (p. 197). In Sub-Saharan Africa, Studies by Wober (as cited in Mpofu) and White (as cited in Mpofu) on the Baganda of Uganda and Sternberg *et al.* (2001) on the Chewa of Northern Zambia and Luo of Kenya also confirm the 'socially spirited view of intelligence' reflected by the Zimbabweans as 'interpersonal expertise'. The indigenous view that emphasizes social, practical or functional ability is also confirmed in Shona and Ndebele proverbs (Mpofu).

Zimbabwean students and the Shona and Ndebele proverbs studied by Mpofo (2004) are indeed valid sources for investigating indigenous conceptions of intelligence but the picture would be incomplete without viewing the construct of giftedness through the folktale window of culture. As observed by Finnegan (1976), human roles and attributes are dramatized and satirized in folktales. This study goes beyond proverbs and perceptions of intelligence to include folktales in probing Shona cultural perceptions of giftedness.

Research on indigenous views of intelligence is incomplete without implicit theories of giftedness based on indigenous views in the sub-region. While the relationship between giftedness and intelligence is still not clearly defined, Dabrowski's theory (Piechowski, 2002) proposes that it is the intensity of overexcitabilities that marks the difference between the two. Dabrowski identified five overexcitabilities or modes of experiencing—psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imagination and emotional. Dabrowski believed that giftedness involves talents in specific abilities and intelligences plus five components of psychic life (overexcitabilities). Overexcitabilities are the 'heart and fire' of giftedness and 'they ring loud and clear' in gifted children. Therefore this study goes beyond intelligence to delve into the realm of intensity of overexcitabilities to reflect Shona culture's views of giftedness.

Culture and giftedness

Giftedness does not emerge in a cultural vacuum. Culture is a significant variable in understanding giftedness in its entirety. As defined by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1986), giftedness is a social construct resulting from social expectations and individual abilities. Commenting on the role of culture, Feldman and Goldsmith (1986) concurs with Stone (2003) in the observation that certain forms of giftedness appear to be universal while others depend on the nature of culture. According to Stone, 'At a particular time and place, pursuing a specific field may be rewarded, ignored or punished' (p. 13). The importance of culture in understanding intelligence was highlighted by Kroeber's (as cited in Friedman & Rogers, 1998) reactions to the dangerous notions of racial supremacy that encouraged Nazi ideology based on Galton's eugenics. The importance of culture in defining giftedness is best represented by Isaac Newton (as cited in Friedman & Rogers) when he observed, 'If I have seen further than other men, it is on standing on shoulders of giants.' This means that any seemingly original idea or invention by an individual is first implied within his/her culture by previous creators. According to Simonton (1984) the social-historical environment provides possibilities which talented individuals recognize to express their creativity. From a Marxist-Vygotskian perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), culture mediates intelligence. No individual abilities can exist outside collective consciousness. Social abilities first exist in the collective environment before they can be transformed and internalised into an individual's psyche. Therefore culture is very important to the study of both giftedness and intelligence. Culture encompasses a totality of a people's way of life, their unique practices, beliefs, attitudes, communication styles, customs, rituals and values representing their worldview.

This research is an exploratory study of Shona culture of Zimbabwe's views of giftedness. People's conceptions of intelligence are the basis for proposing implicit theories of intelligence in their communities (Sternberg, 1985). People make judgements and decisions in their environment based on their conceptions of intelligence. This study is part of the effort to search for eco-culturally valid definitions of giftedness and intelligence in light of the problems noted on the transportability of Western psychological notions of intelligence and technologies into non-Western societies. The study is also intended to arouse interest towards developing giftedness in students, our special human resource, particularly in Zimbabwe which at present offers no formal special programming for gifted students (Williams & Mitchell, 1989). As argued by Feldman and Goldsmith (1986), certain prodigies will only surface when culture is ready to recognize and nurture excellence in the particular domain. It is further hoped that the more we understand giftedness in its cultural diversity, the more we will be sensitive to the plight of gifted language minority students in mainstream Western-oriented gifted education programmes.

Method

A questionnaire that included open-ended questions (see Appendix) was sent by email to twenty randomly selected members of the Zimbabwean academic fraternity with a strong Shona cultural background and lecturing experience in Social Sciences, Shona language and Cultural Studies. Sixteen completed questionnaires were received (80 per cent) from eight male and eight female participants. Previous studies by Irvine (1972) and Mpofu (1994) found Shona students to be reliable reporters of their communities. This is assumed to be even truer for academics of Shona cultural background that are familiar with research ethics and in this study were required to report on non-personal/non-threatening issues. Participants responded to questions based on selected themes derived from conventional psychology and Shona oral literature and folklore to reflect Shona views of giftedness. Questions were tactically arranged with subtle repetitions to check the consistency of responses and gauge a consensus without irritating the respondents.

Thematic analysis

Shona definition of giftedness. Question 1 sought information on Shona definitions of giftedness. The attributes of giftedness articulated in Shona culture (Q2) also shed light on the Shona definition of giftedness while Q1 elicited information on a direct definition.

Characteristics/attributes of giftedness. What characteristics or attributes of giftedness are acknowledged in Shona culture? Reference to characteristics of giftedness viewed through the folktale window of culture (Q3) was a probing technique to

elicit more data and also to validate attributes identified in Q2. Reference to attributes of giftedness epitomized in Shona folktale heroes is equivalent to Mpfu's (2004) inquiry on students' *ideal intelligent person*. Reference to folktales was also necessary to ensure that the study only collected authentic Shona cultural views, given that participants could be influenced by the two systems of causation in operation in Zimbabwe. Finnegan (1976) and Fortune (1980) confirm that the folktale plays an important role in socializing children on a culture's ideals. The folktale can therefore be trusted to either provide or complement data reflecting Shona culture's views of giftedness.

Whether giftedness is valued in Shona culture/value system. The basic question (Q5) required participants to provide evidence if they believed that giftedness is valued in Shona society. Data were also sought on the gender aspect (i.e., Q6 regarding the recognition of female giftedness in Shona culture). Reference to eminent persons acknowledged as gifted in Shona culture (Q9) sheds light on some of the valued domains of giftedness.

Beliefs about the origins of giftedness or talents. Questions sought to expose beliefs about origins and ownership of giftedness in Shona culture.

Commonly acknowledged domains or forms of giftedness. Questions elicited information on commonly acknowledged domains of giftedness in Shona culture. Q2 on attributes of giftedness and Q3 on giftedness attributes dramatized in folktales were designed to reflect domain-specific giftedness acknowledged in Shona culture. Eminent persons (Q9) could be living, historical or legendary but what counts most is what they are famous for.

Provision for collecting any other relevant data. The technique for collecting any other relevant data in the questionnaire allowed the gurus and experts of Shona culture flexibility to cover any information potentially overlooked by the researchers. This technique is equivalent to interview probing in the absence of real interviews.

Insights for recommendations. The questionnaire was designed to provide data that would be useful in making educational recommendations.

Response narratives were sorted and analysed by themes in frequency tables indicating the number of times an aspect was identified. Frequencies do not necessarily tally with the number of participants consulted per question as questions were combined into themes. The results of this study were confirmed by two prominent Zimbabwean professors of social sciences in both content and use of Shona terminology.

Table 1. Identified Shona definition of giftedness key terms

| Key Terms | Frequencies |
|---|-------------|
| a) <i>Chipo</i> (something special given selectively) | 16 |
| b) ability or aptitude for performing some task | 16 |
| c) inborn/present from birth | 16 |
| d) outstanding, unusual, rare, special | 16 |
| e) involves expertise, excellence | 14 |
| f) reflected in skilled tasks | 12 |

Results

Table 1 shows that the Shona cultural definition of giftedness' key terms are, '*chipo*', 'ability or aptitude for performing a task', 'inborn', 'outstanding', 'unusual', and 'special', 'involves expertise/excellence' and 'reflected in skilled tasks'. The terms were identified in more or less the same frequencies. Put together, key terms define giftedness/*chipo* as 'an unusual and prized human attribute believed to be both inherited and spiritually blessed which manifests in extraordinary abilities and expertise in valued and challenging activities of society'. This definition suggests that giftedness is recognized when demonstrated through success in some endeavour. The identified examples of giftedness which confirm the aspect of skill challenge include *chiremba* (healer), *umhizha* (skilled craftsmanship), *mhare* (strategist) and *hombabrume* (talented hunter). The role of *nyamukuta* (midwife) needed special knowledge and expertise to deal with complications of pregnancy and baby delivery. The element of success is quite evident in the definition as a hallmark of giftedness or talent.

Table 2 shows nine attributes of giftedness, listed in order of frequency of identification. Nearly all of the attributes cited are consistent with success as a mark of

Table 2. Attributes/characteristics of giftedness

| Frequencies | Descriptors |
|--|-------------|
| a) succeeding where most people fail/excellence (<i>unyanzvi</i>) | 28 |
| b) ability to outwit others, smart talk (<i>uchenjeri</i>) | 23 |
| c) craft literacy (<i>umhizha</i>) | 21 |
| d) awesome expertise, (<i>umazvikokota /umhare</i>) | 20 |
| e) motivation/energy (<i>shunguviro/havi</i>) | 18 |
| f) humility /introversion (<i>kuzvidukupisa</i>) | 17 |
| g) ability to learn fast/develop fast | 12 |
| h) visionary, insightful/expert (<i>godobore</i>) | 10 |
| i) perseverance (<i>kushingirira</i>) | 8 |

giftedness and are also consistent with the definition identified in Table 1. Being successful, or practical intelligence (Sternberg, 1999), was consistently identified in Mpofu's (2002, 2004) studies as a mark of intelligence acknowledged by Shona students. The attributes reflected in Table 2 cover the cognitive, linguistic, kinaesthetic, affective and psychomotor domains and the aspects of Renzulli's (1978) three-ring definition of giftedness. Craft literacy (*umhizha*) refers to creative imagination crystallized to solve problems, for example, making a hunting trap (*dhibhura*). Craft literacy helps an individual to figure out solutions to the problem in his/her head.

The characteristics in Table 2 are dramatized in the imaginative world of the Shona folktale. Succeeding where others fail is typified in the folktale where the humble and introverted little Tortoise opened the community well to the water table during a drought when all other animals had failed and given up. It is also the humble and despised little Tortoise who arrests Hare, the impossible trickster, and brings him to justice for messing up their well, which he had refused to dig in cooperation with other animals. Ability to solve problems is typified through the successes of Tortoise to reach the water table, whilst in most folktales Hare succeeds in his role as policeman of the forest and guardian of rights or protector of the weak through extraordinary wits. Hare's role portrays a view that smartness matters more than size or physical strength. On challenging tasks, it is the despised, humble and introverted Chinamapezi (pitted with measles) who won the best bride and equally despised and introverted Tortoise who saved the forest people during a drought. Learning fast is typified in the folktale when Hare briefly borrows Baboon's mbira musical instrument which he masters fast and outplays Baboon in a contest to resolve the ownership quarrel. In another folktale identified by subjects, Hare is promoted to position of official mbira—entertainer of the forest—overthrowing Baboon who lacked talent. Both folktales connote a similar Biblical Parable of Talents message that you can lose your talent if you don't develop it. Prodigious development is demonstrated in Karikoga Gumiremiseve (one who, alone, achieved great things with only a bow and ten arrows) (Chakaipa, 1958), an old world folktale based novel and Mbimbindoga (one who trusts in himself) folktale. Both characters mature early and demonstrate competence and knowledge unheard of at their age. They both survive death through self-reliance, vision, courage and quickness of wit. Both characters have apt names coined to connote self-reliance as part of their fate.

The folktale, as a product of creative imagination (Vygotsky, 2004), employs talking animals to dramatize, uncensored, an imaginary society of justice, equality and respect. The storyteller suggests that the problems of society are solved by none other than gifted persons.

As indicated in Table 3, giftedness is highly valued in Shona society. Hence the existence of the following special titles of honour identified by the subjects:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <i>mazvikokota</i> (expert) | <i>mhizha</i> (expert craftman) |
| <i>mhare</i> (champion, strategist) | <i>godobore</i> (expert healer, diviner) |
| <i>hurudza</i> (successful farmer) | <i>hombarume</i> (successful hunter) |

Table 3. Shona Values and Giftedness

| Value descriptors | Frequencies |
|--|-------------|
| a) Giftedness is traditionally valued | 16 |
| b) Female giftedness is traditionally valued | 16 |
| c) Giftedness is collectively owned | 16 |
| d) Humility rather than boasting is allowed | 14 |
| e) Deviance is suppressed | 5 |
| f) Recognition in the school curriculum | 4 |

Such titles are conferred at special ceremonies of honour with beer and a beast slaughtered to encourage the spirits believed to enhance the special powers (*ushavi*). Logical talk (wit) is valued by Shona people who customarily dismiss unceremoniously anyone who utters nonsense or daydreams during a court session. Such persons are relegated to skinning and roasting a goat while real thinkers get on with deliberations. Gifted people were recognized for solving problems in society as demonstrated in *ngano* (folktales). The gifted storyteller was acknowledged by being visited by more youths who brought firewood to show their appreciation. However, misunderstood giftedness or deviancy was punished and suppressed as suggested by the fate of Mbimbindoga whose extraordinarily advanced maturity and talents were classified as bad omens (*mashura*) and had to be eliminated. His giftedness was something that a preliterate and superstitious society was not prepared for, but they failed to eliminate him because he was too smart to fall into their traps. He later assumed a chieftainship somewhere. His survival and ultimate achievement confirms the view that superior intelligence cannot be forever suppressed. Table 3 also shows that all the participants concurred that giftedness is collectively owned. The Shona say 'Your gift is given to you for us' (*Chipo chako chipo chedu*). Hence Shona culture acknowledges no patent and copyright rules on creativity. At the same time gifts are said to be owned by the Great Spirit (God). With regard to the modern school curriculum, participants felt that there was not much recognition for Shona forms of giftedness in the school curriculum. It was suggested that most gifted persons relied on individual efforts as the school curriculum emphasized academic competence. For example, Shona sculp-

Table 4. Beliefs in Shona culture

| Belief descriptors | Frequencies |
|---|-------------|
| a) inborn/inherited attribute (<i>zvedzinza</i>) | 18 |
| b) Supernatural/blessing from spirits | 16 |
| c) collectively owned by society (no copyright rules) | 20 |
| d) deviance enhanced by evil spirits (shave re-) | 7 |
| e) Lovemaking talent in women (<i>chikapa</i>) | 4 |

turing, which is not taught formally in Zimbabwe, has become world renowned modern art, and well-known traditional musicians like Thomas Mapfumo (honoured with a Masters of Music degree by the University of Zimbabwe and Doctorate of Music degree by Ohio State University) did not make it through the school system.

As shown in Table 4, participants indicated that giftedness is believed to be both biological and spiritually blessed in relation to an individual's ancestors. In Shona beliefs, God is the Supreme Spirit who blesses you through your ancestors. Gifts or talents are only entrusted in an individual for the society. Boasting is discouraged and it is believed that the spirits will curse you and withdraw the gift from you. Being humble and introverted is associated with great achievement as epitomized in the folktales, for example, in the despised and introverted Chinamapezi who won the best bride and equally in humble and quiet Tortoise's great achievements in the forest. This is why when Hare, normally the paragon of forest smartness, brags about his smart tricks and continues to humiliate big animals and abuse the community well, the storyteller neutralizes him with an arrest by Tortoise. Nobody is above the law, thus confirming the Shona proverb *Chikuriri chine chimwe* (Every conqueror has his/her own conqueror—no one is invincible). Beliefs about deviant giftedness were cited seven times with examples of witchcraft and stealing, talents believed to be inspired by evil spirits (*mashave akaipa*). *Chikapa*, a lovemaking technique believed to heighten sexual orgasm between both partners (male and female) was acknowledged four times as one form of female giftedness.

Domains identified in Table 5, though not exhaustive, show the diversity of gifts and talents acknowledged in Shona culture including spiritual, lovemaking and deviant forms like stealing and witchcraft. The diversity of talent domains is supported elsewhere in research (e.g., Gardner, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Romero, 1994; Feldhusen *et al.*, 1997). The arts domain is the most acknowledged, with music topping the list followed by craftsmanship, especially sculpturing, then the affective-humanist domain, including healing and counselling, spiritual and leadership talents. Spiritual gifts are quite evident in this study. Among the subjects identified as gifted are a Shona historical prophet passionately respected as *Sekuru* (Grandfather) Chaminuka who foretold in amazing accuracy great events like tribal wars, change of rainfall patterns in the now Matabeleland region of Zimbabwe, the coming of White colonialism and new world order thereafter. Chaminuka was also a magician. Participants also identified as gifted a spiritual revolutionary war leader of MaShona Resistance to colonialism (*Chimurenga* War, 1896) now passionately called *Mbuya* (Grandmother) Nehanda. Mbuya Nehanda is now declared a national heroine of Zimbabwe. The case for recognizing spiritual intelligence is still debatable but Chapman (1998–2004) feels ready and bold enough to declare 'spiritual intelligence' the ninth intelligence and take the honours if Gardner himself does not do so.

Summary and discussion

Shona culture of Zimbabwe defines giftedness (*chipo*) as a unique and prized human attribute which is both inherited and spiritually blessed and demonstrated in

Table 5. Gifted persons by domain

| Talent domain | Gifted person | Gender | Frequency |
|--|-------------------|--------|-----------|
| a) Arts-Musical (Traditional beat) (Mbira player, singer & dancer) (Vocalist, composer) (Revolutionary mbira player) (Mbira musician) (Mbira musician) (Musician, composer) | Thomas Mapfumo | M | 12 |
| | Stella Chiweshe | F | 12 |
| | Oliver Mtukudzi | M | 10 |
| | Master Chiweshe | M | 8 |
| | Ephat Mujuru* | M | 8 |
| | Chiwoniso Maraire | F | 8 |
| | Big Tembo* | M | 1 |
| Craftwork Stone Sculpture | Domnic Benhura | M | 5 |
| | Nicholas | M | 1 |
| | Mukomberanwa | — | — |
| Pottery/Basketry | — | M/F | 3 |
| | — | F | 6 |
| b) Affective/Humanist | Jairos Jiri | M | 4 |
| c) Linguistics -Writer/Storyteller -Orator | Charles Mungoshi | M | 4 |
| | — | M | 2 |
| d) Spiritual – Diviner/prophet -Healing/Counselling Revolutionary Leadership | Sekuru Chaminuka* | M | 4 |
| | — | F/M | 4 |
| | Mbuya Nehanda* | F | 4 |
| e) Leadership | Tsuro (folktale) | ** | 4 |
| f) Lovemaking art/chikapa | — | F | 3 |
| g) Deviance - stealing <i>shave rokuba</i> -Witchcraft- <i>shave rokuroya</i> | — | M/F | 2 |
| | — | M/F | 1 |

Note: * Deceased; **No name was given

extraordinary abilities and expertise across a variety of domains of valued human activities. The arts (especially music and sculpture), affective-humanistic, linguistic-cognitive, spiritual and leadership domains are the most acknowledged domains of giftedness in Shona society. Linguistic gifts are associated with dispositional intelligence (*uchenjeri*) in the cognitive domain (Irvine, 1970, 1988). Giftedness is recognized in both males and females in their gendered roles but fewer examples of gifted females were identified than males. Giftedness is believed to be given for the common good, like solving the problems of society. Individuals are recognized and praised for their talents but they are not allowed to boast about their abilities. It seems that humble and introverted persons are perceived as great achievers who can persevere even when the going gets tough as typified in Tortoise and Chinamapezi's folktales. These views are not necessarily reflective of the modern Shona citizen of Zimbabwe who, as observed by Mpofu (2002, 2004), is affected by two systems of causation (i.e., indigenous Shona values and Anglo-Western values). However,

since the average Zimbabwean is rural and the researched views are part and parcel of Shona people's cultural identity, we believe these views entail important implicit theories for studying giftedness and intelligence in Zimbabwe. The researched views are significant in the search for eco-culturally relevant explicit theories needed in the process of indigenizing the psychology of human potential in the Sub-Saharan Africa.

Comparison with other views of giftedness

As observed by Romero (1994), the Keresan Pueblo Indian Americans have a global view of giftedness, regarding it as a 'global human quality encompassed by all individuals' (p. 4). Their perception is centred on the 'inner desire to want to contribute to the well-being of Pueblo life'. Harmony and relationships are emphasized goals in Pueblo life and existence. The Keresan Pueblo have no direct term for giftedness in their vocabulary but they have an inclusive view intertwined with their values reflecting their concept of an ideal citizen. In their view, reports Romero, 'A gifted person is one who exemplifies native culture and values through his/her convictions and behaviour' (p. 6). The ideal gifted person should possess traits/attributes in four domains-humanistic-affective, special linguistic abilities, ingenuity-cultural knowledge, and creativity associated with special psychomotor abilities. For the Keresan Pueblo culture, comparing persons through parameters of intelligence and giftedness is a totally alien and foreign Anglo-Western concept. The Maori of New Zealand have a similar holistic view of giftedness which encompasses interpersonal relationships and aspects of spirituality. Maori values, which are integrated with their religion, stress caring and serving others '*manaakitanga*' (Hyde, 2001).

Based on comparative elements outlined by Romero (1994, p. 11), there are some similarities and differences between the Keresan Pueblo, the Maori and Shona culture of Zimbabwe's views of giftedness. Some similarities are evident in terms of inclusiveness of views and values like cooperation, interrelationships and community focus of giftedness which differ from an 'exclusive' concept of giftedness, and individual-focused, distinctive and pro-competition Western values. Western views of giftedness exclude community values like togetherness, and highlight differences or distinctions in individuals' abilities. Shona culture shares similarities with the Maori on the aspect of spiritualism. For example, Shona sculptors operate on the theme of spirit in the stone. They believe the rock speaks and they listen and operate to release its spirit, thereby manifesting creative and thematic artefacts. As confirmed by Bourdillon (1987), intelligence in Shona society is understood in the context of centrality of humanness, spiritualism and kinship of value systems.

However, Shona culture has specific terms for giftedness (*chipo/ushavi*), for example, *Ane shave rechikoro* (S/he is highly academically talented). Shona culture recognizes distinctions between those who are gifted and those who are not. Both competition and cooperation are valued and harmony in society is maintained through checks and balances based on the skills of the very gifted people (with reference to folktale plots). Culturally, it is believed that everyone has some gift, therefore

no one should boast or be selfish in the ways they use their abilities. This is why the humble, quiet, and despised persons turn out to be the heroes in the end, for the Shona say, *hapana anomhanya achisiya mumwe. Weshure achave wemberi kwazvo* (Nobody can progress ahead of others. Even the most backward shall be far ahead). While boastfulness is not allowed, special and enviable titles of honour are conferred to distinguished persons in recognition for excellence (e.g., *mazvikokota* (expert), *mhare* (fighter, strategist)).

While Shona culture of Zimbabwe shares similar values of promoting community harmony with both the Keresan Pueblo and Maori cultures, it also reflects a similar fundamental view of giftedness as espoused in Western psychology if we put aside issues of values masking our perceptions. The attributes of giftedness identified in Table 2, although not exhaustive, and the diversity of talent domains confirmed in this study, basically agree with contemporary views of giftedness in modern psychology. We note that studies of views of giftedness of the Keresan Pueblo and the Maori mostly concentrated on values systems relating to giftedness, but in essence giftedness manifests in all racial and cultural groups in similar ways. The real difference with Western views is in the cultural values including the spiritual element enshrined in some cultures like the Shona and Maori views of giftedness.

As observed by Richardson (2003), other nations (e.g., Japan and the Scandinavian countries) which do not differentiate education programmes by parameters of giftedness, indeed recognize the existence of giftedness but they emphasize effort. They share a similar motto, 'As far as inborn ability goes, I can't say it isn't there, but I say it doesn't matter. If you persevere you will have a good outcome.'

As observed in this study, Shona views of giftedness do not militate against academic progress or development in any other field of endeavour. The same cultural definition of giftedness can be applied with a few modifications to the new domains. If a child is able to demonstrate academic success ahead of others, by Shona definitions s/he is gifted. What may differ is the attributions for their talents which affect motivation to achieve. This is what needs to be investigated. There is a need to include the diversity of talent domains as recognised in Shona culture in the school curriculum. Those gifted persons acknowledged in Shona culture (i.e., living heroes) have largely relied on their own resources and effort to develop their abilities. The schools should harmonize the two systems of causation and come up with one broad definition which is culturally responsive and relevant to the needs of functioning in the modern economy.

Conclusion

Perceptions of giftedness are often masked in a culture's values, needs and goals (Romero, 1994). This study has established that Shona culture's basic views of giftedness do not differ fundamentally from contemporary views in modern psychology (if value elements are held constant). Demonstrated success, expertise/excellence, ability to solve problems and interpersonal relationships are the hallmarks of Shona culture's views of giftedness. The results are consistent with findings in previous

studies on intelligence (e.g., Mpofu, 2002, 2004). Shona culture attributes giftedness to heredity (ancestry) with hints of spiritual elements. It seems giftedness is basically a natural trait whose manifestation is masked in culture. Giftedness is realized, nurtured, moderated, defined and manifested within a culture. The value systems of a culture selectively develop human potential in a domain in ways compatible with its worldview. This seems to explain why some cultures recognize intelligence and giftedness in domains not acknowledged by other cultures. Therefore the need to expand the definition of giftedness beyond the IQ paradigm makes sense not just to accommodate culturally diverse students underrepresented in Anglo-American gifted education programmes, but also as the way forward to develop human potential optimally. What appear to be naive beliefs of some native cultures could in fact be signals of useful implicit theories (Sternberg, 1985) warranting research to fully appreciate human potential.

Future research

While the study explored the indigenous Shona cultural views of giftedness, it was also constrained by distant communication methods in selecting participants. There is a need for further studies to confirm these findings with the wider society of Zimbabwe, especially the elders who are the guardians and experts of Shona culture (*ndongamabwerume dzembiri yakare*). A similar study is also needed (with the same questionnaire) to be carried out among the Ndebele society of Zimbabwe since both Shona and Ndebele cultures share elements in Zimbabwe's school curriculum. Major research is underway to establish talent attributions or inspirational forces of identified creative and talented persons of Zimbabwe, especially creative crafts persons identified at self-help home industries like Siyaso in Harare. Mpofu (2004) identified two systems of causation. This study has highlighted views of giftedness from the indigenous side but we do not know the factors to which the gifted third millennium youths of Zimbabwe attribute their talents in light of the two causation systems in operation (that is, indigenous and Anglo-Western values).

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Appendix

- Q1** How is giftedness or talent defined /or described in the Shona culture?
- Q2** Identify any typical examples of what is considered as giftedness or talent in Shona culture. Your examples could be given in brief and simple descriptions.
- Q3** Identify the attributes/ characteristics of giftedness portrayed in typical characters in well-known Shona folktales (*ngano*). Brief examples are welcome.
- Q4** Cite any examples of giftedness manifested by girls and women in Shona culture.
- Q5** In your opinion, is giftedness valued/or encouraged in Shona culture and traditions? Type x in the right bracket for answer.

Yes[] No[]

Elaborate with examples wherever possible

- Q6** Is female giftedness valued in Shona culture and traditions?

Yes[] No[]

Elaborate with examples wherever possible.

- Q7** To what factor(s) does Shona culture attribute the origins of gifts and talents in some people? For example any typical beliefs held, etc.
- Q8** Are there any particular forms of giftedness/or talent in which the Shona people of Zimbabwe are most recognised for?
- Q9** Also cite any examples of eminent persons living/ historical/or legendary even in a folktales whose giftedness is acknowledged in Shona culture. Relate their accomplishments or talent.
- Q10** In your opinion, is there consistency in the recognition and development of Shona cultural forms of giftedness in the Zimbabwean school curricula?
- Q11** State any other information you feel should be considered to shed light on giftedness as reflected in Shona culture.
- Q12** Who owns giftedness in the traditional Shona society? Indicate your response from options below

[] It is collectively owned by society/No copywriter rules

[] It is property of the individual

[] Not sure

****If you know any useful references on the subject in English or Shona language cite...**

Thank you for your valuable contribution

Mazviita.