Identifying Gifted English Language Learners: A Search for Commonalities

By

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Abstract

This study explored the identification practices of three different public school districts in the

United States, in an effort to discover the way they modify traditional methods in order to

include more ELLs in their gifted programs. These three cases, each chosen because they are

located within states that claim to fully fund the gifted education they mandate, were studied

with the intent of comparing districts and discovering potential commonalities. This research

found that while similarities do exist, the lack of guidance at the state and national levels

regarding research-based methods for identifying gifted ELLs results in inconsistencies in the

way each district executes policy.

Keywords: gifted, ELL, bias, identification, commonalities

Introduction

Washington state was my childhood home; the east side, not the rainy side. My piece of Washington is nestled deep in the northern Cascades, about a mile from the Canadian border. Since Tonasket is responsible for over half of the United States' apple production, it also draws a large population of migrant workers. My parents deliberately hired undocumented workers because, as my father put it, "They showed up every day, worked twice as fast as the others and never caused any trouble!" Their kids came to work with them, regardless of season, gifting me with an endless mob of playmates who should have been in school but who were, instead, teaching me very fancy words to call my older brothers. My friends and I seemed to have been able to overcome the language barrier more easily than the adults in our lives. We were able to communicate, learn from each other and enjoy each other. My parents, on the other hand, never learned any Spanish. "If they want to live here, they need to learn our language."

We moved away from Tonasket when I was seven, but I remained drawn to language, the art and science of it, the rest of my life. A linguist in the Army and a student of linguistics and second-language learning early in my undergraduate career, I eventually became a teacher of English to speakers of other languages. I was going to be the reason my orchard friends had a seat in the schoolhouse, the bridge to all the opportunities we white kids take for granted. Access to a life other than picking somebody else's apples. I had a gift for language and a passion for the underprivileged. I was sure I had found my calling. Then, I met Arturo[1].

I was eight-months pregnant at the time, working part-time in an elementary school that was eagerly awaiting their Title 1 designation. The majority of our students received free or

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[1] Names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

reduced lunch, we had a waiting list to receive special education services and only one ESOL teacher, who did not speak Spanish, doing her best to manage an overwhelming need. We had many, many Spanish-speaking students of varying levels of proficiency in English and it was not uncommon to welcome a student who had not been in the country long at all, or who arrived without any information about their previous education. Arturo was no exception. He came to the fifth grade the day after he arrived in the United States, terrified and confused. Understandably shy, and due to the stereotype believed about his country of origin, Arturo was assumed to be of very low ability and possibly low intelligence.

Our interpreter confirmed that he had never had any exposure to English at home or back in Mexico, but he did attend school when his father did not need his help at work. My heart ached for Arturo. I could see in his eyes that he was miserable sitting in a desk all day, forced to study English at a Kindergarten level; learning the names of his colors and the letters of the English alphabet. I started sneaking him Spanish magazines and would play him music he could understand and enjoy. The school had a very strict policy about the use of English only when inside the building, and there were no Spanish books in the library. He checked out novels anyway and made lists of words to learn. I would watch him cross them off, one by one. He never finished a list completely before he already had another long one going. He began doodling algebraic equations in his notebooks when he thought nobody was looking and by the end of his second week at school, I caught him laughing at my jokes.

Having grown up in a family of gifted children and having also raised my own, I began to question what our next steps for Arturo were. The startling truth was that there were none. We had no way to test him for giftedness and even if we had, who would teach him? What would we teach him? Our school had no Gifted teacher, and even if we could borrow one, it was doubtful

she would speak Spanish fluently enough to provide any kind of higher-level enrichment for Arturo. A few days before I left, the school received their Title 1 and with it, two ESOL paraeducators. I was pleased to at least see Arturo receiving math instruction at his level, in Spanish, alongside the prescribed English language curriculum. He continued reading novels in English and making his lists. I wondered how long it would be before he was writing; before he could argue a position or advocate for himself. I hoped he would find the words to ask for more because he needed more. He needed to be taught in a way that he could grow. He deserved the opportunity to experience challenge and rigor; no less than the boy next to him for whom the tests are written.

An Emerging Research Question

I wondered how Arturo's identity influenced the way his teachers and I perceived his intelligence. If he had been white and from a middle-class family, would we have judged his abilities differently? Why does our focus fix on remediation when a child does not fluently speak the language with which we are familiar? In 2009, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that the number of school-aged children in the United States who speak a language other than English at home had more than doubled since 1980, rising from 4.7 million to 11.2 million, or 21 percent of the country's student population (2011). More recently, the NCES has estimated that by the fall of 2027, there will be more than 52.1 million English language learners (ELLs)[2] enrolled in U.S. public schools (2018). With the growing number of ELLs in our classrooms, bias, whether conscious or unconscious, is a problem that we cannot

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[2] For the purpose of this paper, the use of the term "English Language Learner" will be used to refer to students for whom their still-developing English proficiency hinders instruction in English-speaking public schools. Students who speak more than one language at home but are fluent in English and no longer qualify for supports will not be included in this definition.

ignore any longer (Castellano, 2011; Harris et al., 2007; Matthews & Castellano, 2014; Ryser, 2018a).

We know from previous research that educators are more likely to associate racial/ethnic minority groups with low intelligence and low levels of academic ambition than to assume that they may have goals of or the ability for excellence (Felder et al., 2015; Ford et al., 2007; Ryser, 2018a). Discriminatory attitudes in educators have been criticized as one of the biggest factors in the continued underidentification and underrepresentation of ELLs in gifted and talented programs across the country (Ford et al., 2008; Harris et al., 2007; Harris et al., 2009; Lewis-Moreno, 2007; Siegle et al., 2016). Even in cases where ELLs perform at the same level, academically, they are less likely to be identified for gifted programming than are students who are white. (Siegle et al., 2016).

We are left to wonder then, what is the best way to assess each and every student that walks our hallways? Isn't this an unspoken oath we take as teachers: to educate every child, right where they are? How do we, then, regardless of color or socioeconomic status or language, teach them in the best possible way, affording them the opportunity to be exposed to rigor? Is it possible that there is already somebody out there who is doing it well and if so, what may we learn from them?

The purpose of this research is to better understand the obstacles in the identification of gifted English Language Learners in the United States in order to develop strategies for more equitable identification processes. With this in mind, there are two research questions that actuate this project:

1. What strategies do districts with diverse populations use to modify traditional methods of gifted identification for the purpose of increasing opportunity for English Language Learners?

2. What role does teacher education play in the identification of gifted English Language Learners and how is this influenced by funding?

Reviewing the Literature

Assessment as Qualification

At the beginning of the twentieth century, as research in education and psychology was advancing, studies in mental hereditability began evolving to include investigations into the unique learning abilities of subnormal and supernormal children (NAGC, n.d.b). Thanks to Lewis Terman's (1916) seminal studies in educating the gifted, graded schools began realizing they could not adequately meet the educational needs of gifted children and by 1918, elementary-aged children all over the country were passing tests to prove they were worthy to be separated from their lower-ability cohorts and taught with higher-level curriculum or taken to self-contained schools for the gifted and talented (Van Tassel-Baska, 2010). Although gifted education policies and programs, as well as the very definitions of giftedness used in the United States, have evolved over the last century (NAGC & CSDGP, 2015; Reis, 2004), public schools remain reliant on standardized tests, or tests administered and scored in a consistent and standard manner, for the use of qualifying gifted students for services (Callahan et al., 2013; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012; NAGC & CSDGP, 2015). The goal of this paper is not to scrutinize the use of standardized testing in general, but to examine its use in gifted identification and discuss the

validity issues this kind of assessment has when being used with diverse populations, especially ELLs.

The identification process for students who may be gifted begins, most commonly, with a teacher nomination or referral (Allen, 2017; Callahan et al., 2013; Frasier at al., 1995); a request for consideration for advanced or more rigorous curriculum. In most cases, the teacher makes this appeal as a response to high achievement or after observation of the student exhibiting characteristics of giftedness (Allen, 2017; Callahan et al., 2013; NAGC & CDSPG, 2015). Most school districts use some form of standardized assessment as part of their screening process, attempting to measure cognitive ability or potential to learn at a more elevated level than their peers (Broderson et al., 2017; Callahan et al., 2013; NAGC & CDSPG, 2015). Scores above the pre-determined minimum, matched with suitable prior achievement, will generally get the nod from school administration to proceed with an assessment of the child's actual intelligence, known as IQ testing (Broderson et al., 2017; NAGC & CDSPG, 2015).

Currently the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children, 5th Edition (2014), is one of the two most widely used by public schools (as cited in Broderson, et al., 2017), accompanied by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales. Each of these tests is required to be administered by a licensed psychometrician and produces scores on multiple scales, resulting in a final number believed to represent a child's intellectual ability (Broderson et al., 2017). Despite the urging of researchers (Broderson et al., 2017; McCluskey, 2017; Renzulli, 1982; Ryser, 2018b; Sternberg, 2017; Worrell, 2009), to not reduce the value of a child's intelligence down to one number, the focus of public schools in the United States continues to be the IQ score (Renzulli, 2004; Sternberg, 2017).

Underserved Populations

One would expect that the racial and socioeconomic demographics of a district's gifted program match its overall student population, especially since research has shown that giftedness exists in all peoples and cultures (Broderson et al., 2017; Renzulli, 2004; Siegle et al., 2016). Unfortunately, this is overwhelmingly not the case. Students who are culturally, linguistically or economically diverse continue to be underrepresented in gifted and talented programs across the country (Card & Guiliano, 2016; Felder et al., 2015; Johnsen, 2018; Reis, 2004; Siegle et al., 2016). Siegle et al. (2015) reported that even among students with the same math and reading scores, students who are white are 2.5 times more likely to be identified for gifted programs in the United States than are students who are black, Hispanic, who are eligible for free or reduced school lunches or who have ever been classified as ELL (as cited in Siegle at al., 2016). In the U-46 public school district of Illinois, black students make up almost twenty percent of the student population, but only ten percent of the district's gifted population (Ford, 2014). While less than one percent of Seattle's black students are enrolled in gifted and talented programs, and only about two percent of the city's Latino students, almost twelve percent of Seattle's students who are white have a seat (Rowe, 2017). The U.S. Department of Education ran a longitudinal study of eighth-grade programs for gifted students in 1991 and indicated that, "Students whose families' socioeconomic status places them in the top quartile of the population are about five times more likely to be in programs for gifted students than are students from families in the bottom quartile," (Borland & Wright, 1994, p26). Lewis, Novak and Coronado (2015) studied two different school districts in Texas, finding in the first school only 1.21% of the gifted population were ELLs even though ELLs comprised 58.23% of the total school population. The second school's student body was 39.18% ELLs, while only 8.8% of their gifted students were

identified as ELL. In fact, statewide, ELLs makeup 26.6 % of Texas' public-school population, yet only 3% of the population of the state's gifted and talented programs (as cited in Coronado & Lewis, 2017).

English Language Learners

For ELLs, discrepancies in gifted identification are compounded since more often than not, these students are representing more than one marginalized category; i.e. racial, cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic (Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Felder et al., 2015; Johnsen, 2018). Because of the likelihood that an English language learner will come from a family that is economically disadvantaged (Ryser, 2018a; USCB, 2016), it is vital that educators consider the effects poverty can have on demonstrations of giftedness. Children from low-income families generally have less access to the opportunities of middle-class families, resulting in the inability to acquire the background knowledge and academic skills crucial to the identification process (Clark, 2013; Felder et al., 2015; Siegle et al., 2016). Awareness of the student's home environment and the potential for differences in how they may demonstrate their giftedness is imperative to accurate identification (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012).

Gifted English Language Learners may not always display their abilities in ways with which native English-speaking teachers are familiar (Castellano, 1998; Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Felder et al., 2015; Johnsen, 2018; NAGC, 2010; Ryser, 2018a). Many teachers are not aware that each culture values giftedness in a unique way and therefore exhibits giftedness differently (Felder, et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2005). According to Matthews (2006), behaviors exhibited by ELLs that may demonstrate giftedness in their home culture, i.e. leadership, creativity and sense of humor, are not always the behaviors teachers are

looking for when making screening decisions about students (as cited in Felder et al., 2015; Matthews & Castellano, 2014). The teacher referral, in most states, is the first step in the screening process for qualification of gifted services (Allen, 2017; Frasier et al., 1995; Harris et al., 2009; Johnsen, 2018; Milner & Ford, 2007), and therefore, not receiving the teacher referral may be crippling to the identification process itself.

Ford (2010) contended that the barriers to gifted identification for culturally and linguistically diverse students are embedded in teacher attitude and bias (as cited in Allen, 2017; Siegle et al., 2016). Not only do teachers misunderstand cultural differences, as noted above, but often they enter into relationships with ELLs with very low expectations for intellectual ability and motivation to learn (Allen, 2017; Iowa Dept. of Education & Belin-Blank Center, 2008; Moore et al., 2005; Ryser, 2018a). The label, "ELL" becomes the entire identity of the student to the educator, grounding the focus of the student's intellectual abilities in their proficiency in English, thus concentrating on remediation when they could be encouraging excellence (Allen, 2017; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Lee & Anderson, 2009). In my own, very personal, story about Arturo, it was demonstrated how the pre-conceived bias of the teacher could influence the consideration that a student's incapability to speak English is indicative of a delay in cognitive abilities. Without addressing cultural diversity and deficit thinking, educators will continue to only refer children who fit into the stereotypical mold of the gifted child (Dawson, 1997; Felder et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2009; Siegle & Powell, 2004; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007).

The desperate need for professional development in the area of gifted identification of diverse populations is supported by research (Allen, 2017; Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Harradine et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2005; Ryser, 2018a; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007). Briggs, Reis and Sullivan (2008) saw an increase in the identification of linguistically diverse

students in the gifted programs of 25 different schools when they simply increased teacher awareness of the problem and educated them on the different ways that giftedness can be demonstrated by students from diverse backgrounds (Briggs et al., 2008; Ryser, 2018a).

ELLs who do get referred by a teacher rarely qualify due to the overreliance of the schools on standardized tests rich with language and cultural bias (Castellano & Díaz, 2002; Felder et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2009; Johnsen, 2018). Previous research (Felder et al., 2015; Ford, 2013; Iowa Dept. of Ed. & Belin-Blank Center, 2008; Lewis, 2001) tells us it is not reasonable, nor is it valid, to assess a student in a language other than his first, however because of the persistent overreliance on standardized assessments noted previously, the underrepresentation of ELLs in gifted programs is guaranteed (Renzulli, 2004; Ryser, 2018a). While it may seem the solution to the language barrier would be a non-verbal assessment, some researchers (Lohman, 2005; Lohman et al., 2008; Matthews & Kirsch, 2011; Worrell, 2013) have found limitations with the validity of these instruments. Examples include the reliance on verbal instructions (Felder et al., 2015; Lohman, 2005), the inability to predict achievement (Lohman et al., 2008) and the possible misalignment with the test's norms of reference (Ford, 2013; Harris et al., 2007; Ryser, 2018a).

Researchers agree that as long as we continue to employ traditional identification methods, we will continue to reinforce inequity for gifted ELLs and actually widen the achievement and excellence gaps already so prevalent in gifted programs across the United States (Ford, 2013; Renzulli, 2004; Siegle et al., 2016). This review of literature demonstrates a chronic need for more research into successful identification practices for gifted English language learners. Through the following research, we might begin to better understand the ways

in which public school districts are responding to diverse groups of gifted students and perhaps develop practices that make for more equitable identification of gifted learners.

Method

Design

As a qualitative research methodology, case study has a long-standing history, particularly familiar to the social sciences (Creswell, 2013); however, it is also one of the most frequently used qualitative methodologies across other disciplines (Yazan, 2015). Merriam (1998) advocates for the use of case study in education, maintaining that, "the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds," (as cited in Yazan, 2015, p. 6). Although not common in gifted education research (Warne & Price, 2016), case study is the appropriate methodology as my desire was to develop an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in its real-life context (Creswell, 2013).

A collective case study design, defined by Creswell (2013) as the researcher focusing on an issue or concern, selecting multiple cases to illustrate the issue (p. 99), was the most appropriate for the following research because I inquired into gifted programs from several different research sites. In accordance with Yin's description of the logic of replication (2009), procedures for each case were replicated, not for generalization purposes, but to compare and find commonalities between the cases (as cited by Creswell, 2013).

Participants

Criterion sampling was implemented to select public school districts with an overall enrollment of at least fifteen percent ELLs, within states that both mandate and fully fund gifted

education. Establishing the fifteen-percent requirement allowed me to narrow my sampling process, as did limiting the selection to the only four states in the Unites States that both mandate gifted education and fund it. Because this case study aimed to compare a very specific subgroup of students, gifted-identified ELLs in diverse public-school districts, criterion sampling was the most appropriate (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Once a district was selected, the participants sought out were administrators at the district level who would have knowledge of their district's gifted programs and identification policies. The states were coded A, B and C for anonymity purposes, and eventually, the selected districts and participants were labeled to match.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted with an interview guide in order to give some structure to the conversation, but still allow the opportunity to capture the mood and personal perspective of the participant. Interview questions were sent to the interviewee in advance of the agreed-upon, scheduled time and conversations were recorded by the videoconferencing software on which the communication occurred, or with a separate recording device in the case that the interview took place by speakerphone, with the participant's permission. As is common with a guided interview protocol, and in reference to the emic perspective, although a set of questions were developed ahead of time (Appendix A), follow-up questions varied by participant depending on the direction the conversation lead (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

To answer research question number one, which is, "What strategies do districts with diverse populations use to modify traditional methods of gifted identification for the purpose of increasing opportunity for English Language Learners?**"**, I gathered data from multiple sources, including but not limited to documentation available from district websites, archives, district report cards, internal district training documents and manuals (Creswell, 2013). Clarifying

questions were posed to district administrators, during interviews, to confirm or to elucidate collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To answer research question number two, which is, "What role does professional development play in the identification of gifted English Language Learners and how is this influenced by funding?", I interviewed district administrators (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), questioning them specifically about policies that direct professional development in their districts, and how well the funding from the state provides for their needs.

The two voice calls were transcribed and documented, along with each email received containing pertinent data for research and stored along with all other uncoded data specific to each district, to protect the identities and the locations of these districts to the best of my ability.

Analyzing the Data

Analysis took place in tiered perspectives. While reviewing district-level data, collected from online sources as well as interviewees, I compiled the data into a matrix (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Moon, 2017), aligning the districts identified, A, B and C through the aforementioned sampling strategy. This enabled quick comparison of several characteristics including state definitions, demographics, parent communication, referrals, methods of identification and professional development. The matrix was not used to guide analysis of the data, as Patton (2002) cautioned against, but allowed examination of potential commonalities among the selected districts and identified categories where the data was lacking (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To analyze the interview data collected from district administrators, I reflected upon their answers, considering them through the lenses of Adichie (2009) and Anzaldúa (1987).

Adichie (2009) argued that we view each other through our own collection of stories. She said, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they

are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." As I reflected, I began to think about Arturo, his teachers' personal collection of stories, and perhaps their inability to consider all of the stories he embodies. Viewing the collected data through this lens caused me to look deeper into the teachers' perceptions of ELLs and the single stories onto which they may be clinging, stories that influence the perspectives of the educators making critical decisions about the futures of each English language learner. Adichie said, "The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity... It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar," (2009). When teachers focus on the differences, the lack of language ability, they fail to appreciate the greater story of the student. Using this framework enabled me to ask more insightful follow-up questions during and after the interviews, retrieving a much richer set of data.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa (1987) exposed the reality that borders are constructed things of our imagination, not physical things that separate us into individual demographical boxes. She called it, "… a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary," (p. 3). This reminded me to see the language and the giftedness of the student as only pieces of who they are, each as a side of a boundary line that has been drawn by society; a boundary that is enforced every time a teacher chooses "ELL" as the identity of a student instead of "gifted." Anzaldúa's lens elucidates the struggle of the educator, or the administrator, to see the child as existing on the very boundaries of many different places. When we choose, for someone else, one side of the boundary or the other, we impose on them, "…absolute despot duality that says [they] are able to only one or the other," (pg. 19). Reading Anzaldúa also aided my understanding of the pressure on the teacher to make either/or choices: to decide the fate of a child based on test scores or to bravely challenge the potential boundaries drawn out by district

administrators and state policies. This made me consider other motivating factors, besides personal bias, behind the answers to the questions, and resulted in a more insightful analysis of the interviews overall.

Trustworthiness

First and foremost, I boldly addressed my own bias. I have a soft spot in my heart for ELLs. I also strongly desire to find commonalities in the data. Being aware of that, I made a sincere effort to listen objectively and only transcribed what was spoken during the interview, without adjusting according to my own opinions or thoughts. Before collecting any data, I sought and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Kansas. Conversations with participants were recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms were used for all participants, school districts and states, to maintain anonymity.

Significance

This research is significant because it gives gifted ELLs a voice. It can provide hope to a group of children that have become accustomed to being forgotten. It offers educators the ideas for change in their own districts, their own classrooms. The findings of this study could inspire future research and a chance to further the efforts to find common themes, sharing with other districts who struggle to identify gifted ELLs. Making changes to traditional gifted identification methods increases opportunity for all underserved populations, reforming the way teachers, administrators and all people think about giftedness in general. That it is universal. That it is not worn the same by all children. That it is worth the gift of challenge and rigor, no matter what language it speaks.

Public School District A

I reached out to at least one district in all four states by email, attaching example questions and a cover letter explaining my purpose for research. An administrator from District A responded immediately, agreeing to an interview via Zoom, a videoconferencing software that allows the recording of calls (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This administrator was generous with information and responded immediately to both follow-up emails that were sent for clarification. They will henceforth be referred to as Participant A.

Demographics and Funding

According to the 2018-2019 Enrollment Report, School District A is attended by close to 34,000 unique students, of which approximately 7,480 are classified as English Language Learners (District A, 2018). This district is located within State A which, although it mandates and promises to fund gifted programming, only offers $64 per gifted student to make it happen (Participant A, personal communication, January 31, 2020). Currently, State A is one of forty-two states that does not specifically mention ELLs in their definition of a gifted student (Davidson Institute, 2019), which does not necessarily disqualify an English-learning student from gifted services, but it does leave the decision-making up to each individual district when it comes to identifying and qualifying students for gifted programming who do not speak English as their primary language, as the language most often spoken at home (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], n.d.a). According to Participant A, there are over one hundred languages spoken in District A amongst these ELLs and while they represent 22 percent of the entire student body population, ELLs only take up about 1.5 percent of the student population that has been identified as gifted (Research conversation, October 23, 2019). This is evidence

that although a good 10 percent of native English speakers (NES) are being identified as gifted, only about one half of a percent of ELLs are being identified, which falls below the national average of 1.9 percent (Sanchez, 2017). While these figures are sobering, according to Participant A, they have improved from what the district has reported in previous years (Research conversation, October 23, 2019).

Reflecting upon the high numbers of children on free or reduced lunch (76%), the district's increasing migrant population (not provided) and the percent of the student body who is of African-American descent (20%), Participant posits, "Our district really feels that it's important to focus on equity because we do believe that talent is everywhere," (Research conversation, October 23, 2019). It was this desire that drove the district to reevaluate the way they identified students and to invest in the use of several nontraditional assessment instruments.

Step 1: Referral

Every year, the district engages in a general screening process for second grade students. This screening process consists of the Cognitive Abilities Test, known widely as the CogAT (Participant A, Research conversation, October 23, 2019), a battery of verbal and nonverbal assessments designed to identify students with advanced reasoning skills, independent of linguistic or cultural background (Lohman & Hagen, 2002). The rationale for this approach is to collect preliminary data on students who otherwise may do poorly on a standardized exam and falls in line with researchers who have previously argued the success in universal screening by nonverbal instruments (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Naglieri & Ford, 2003).

Participant A described this as an effort to, "cast a really wide net," (Participant A, research conversation, October 23, 2019), but it is not the only way District A acquires data leading them to students with gifted potential. A parent or teacher can refer a student, or

recommend they be considered for gifted services (Davidson Institute, 2019). A major obstacle

for parent referrals is the simple fact that all parents are not aware they have the ability, or right,

to do so. They may not know what behaviors to look for, as evidence of higher thinking, or what

characteristics are examples of advanced cognitive abilities in their child (Felder et al., 2015;

Siegle et al., 2016). To combat this issue, and using some of the resources provided on the

NAGC website (www.nagc.org), District A begins each academic year with a parent meeting

(Participant A, research conversation, October 23, 2019), where they address the rights and

responsibilities of a gifted child and those of a parent of a gifted child (Oakland & Rossen,

2005). Participant A reported that six district administrators would soon be taking part in a

training with SENG (Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted), an organization dedicated

to addressing the affective needs of gifted children, in an effort to further educate themselves on

how to best support their gifted students, being that the state offers no guidance on such matters.

They have also taken steps to create a support group for parents this year.

Communicating effectively with parents who have limited-English proficiency is an

added challenge, thus District A has invested in a web-based, cellular platform that translates

uploaded Word documents and written text into whichever language the consumer prefers

(Participant A, research conversation, October 23, 2019). Not only does the application,

SchoolCNXT, incorporate every language spoken in District A, but the application also permits

administrators to see whether parents have opened a message, providing intelligence that aids in

ensuring the contact information for each household is current and correct (SchoolCNXT, 2019).

District A recognizes that parents are not the only part of the referral process requiring a

little extra attention. State A does not require classroom teachers to have any pre-service training

in the teaching of children who are gifted, which is alarmingly common and is in fact the case in

forty-eight other states in the United States (NAGC & CSDGP, 2015). Given that teacher

referrals have been charged as the barriers to gifted evaluation for ELLs (Siegle et al., 2016;

Johnsen, 2018), in the interest of reducing exclusions based on cultural differences, one practice

District A began implementing was educating teachers and administrators about the stereotypes

and common misconceptions of children who are gifted (Allen, 2017). Assessments are done by

the district to better understand how to tailor professional development to each population, at

every grade level, in each individual building. Teachers attend seminars during the school year:

sometimes full days and sometimes only an hour at a time. They also receive specialized training

throughout the summer, differentiated for both classroom teachers and gifted consultants. In the

interest of preserving time and dollars, the district distributes monthly emails with details about

behaviors and characteristics of gifted children. The rationale behind this is to equip the

classroom teachers with something they can read in two minutes or less that is able to make an

impact on the way they interact with students who may be gifted (Participant A, research

conversation, October 23, 2019).

The use of the Naglieri scales (Naglieri, 1997) was implemented along with the Renzulli

scales (Renzulli et al., 2002), providing teachers with tools to reference that would assist in a

more accurate referral process. In the elementary grades, District A began applying Kingore's

Observation Inventory, a process of identifying gifted potential in ELLs who would not be easily

identifiable through standardized testing (Kingore, 2008). All three of these instruments aid

teachers in moving their focus away from achievement and onto the individual student

(Participant A, research conversation, October 23, 2019).

Step 2: Testing

Once a student has been recommended for consideration, either by qualifying findings of the CogAT or by teacher or parent referral, the actual evaluation process begins. Building norms, as advised by researchers (Oakland & Rossen, 2005; Renzulli, 2019), which is a comparison of students to their local peers, not to children their age somewhere else in the world, are used as frame of reference, and a team of teachers, administrators and other professionals reviews a portfolio of both quantitative and qualitative data (Felder et al., 2015) to decide if the student qualifies for the district's gifted program. Contrary to the practice of most districts in the United States, but in accordance with guidance from researchers (McCluskey, 2017; Renzulli, 2004; Sternberg, 2017), District A does not use intelligence testing in its assessment process. An English Language Learner may be evaluated using a variety of nonverbal tests, but Participant A believes the most successful screening tool used to qualify an ELL for gifted services is the use of qualitative data (Research conversation, October 23, 2019).

The application of qualitative data to support claims of ability when achievement scores do not measure up to the pre-set, minimum requirements, is just one more way that District A has committed to valuing the individual student. The research supports this commitment (Matthews, 2017; Renzulli, 2004). In general, a native English-speaking student (NES) under consideration for gifted programming is required to perform in the ninety-fifth percentile on an achievement test. In contrast, In District A, ELLs need only demonstrate achievement in the eighty-fifth percentile. Often, as reported by Participant A, an English-learning student falls short of the cutoff, even though it is believed their ability is much higher. In those cases, teachers have the option of providing evidence of advanced, in-class work, which is then used as confirming data to qualify a student for gifted services (Research conversation, October 23, 2019).

One example of qualitative data, unique to ELLs, that is reviewed during the evaluation process is their rate of English acquisition (Iowa Dept. of Education & Belin-Blank Center, 2008). Participant A referenced a project their district had completed two years ago, using the HOPE scale (Peters & Gentry, 2010). District A found that, "The language acquisition time of an English Language Learner is the biggest indicator of ability," (Research Conversation, October 23, 2019). While the average acquisition time of English for a non-native speaker is somewhere around four years, Participant A reported noticing some of their students reaching native-speaker type levels in only nine months. "That's a huge indicator to us that there's some exceptional ability there, because they're able to acquire that English!" (Research conversation, October 23, 2019).

Step 3: Placement

Once identified, students are placed, using a flexible and fluid tiering system and serviced through cluster grouping or pull-out instruction with teachers who are certified to teach gifted students. Participant A provided the following table (Personal communication, January 31, 2020), taken from an internal district document, to assist in the understanding of the criteria for each tier and the ability to move between them:

Table 1

Tier 3 GT Identification:	Tier 2 GT Identification:	Tier 1 GT Identification: Talent Development
• Educational needs must be met through the personalization of a learning plan. • Identification and programming are based on student need, cognitive ability, and academic achievement. • These students consistently represent the top 3-5% in both cognitive ability and overall academic achievement. • Programming examples could include grade level acceleration, early school entrance/early exit/early college entrance, radical acceleration, dual credit options, AP or IB participation, mentorships/internships, student directed learning, inquiry research, compacting, etc. • A personalized learning plan is a priority to match student need.	• Educational needs can often be met in the regular classroom with differentiated instruction and out-of-level curriculum. • Identification and programming are based on student need combined with cognitive ability and/or academic achievement in a content area. • Identification is supported through a variety of assessments and should include quantitative and qualitative data • Programming examples could include acceleration in a content area, cross-age grouping, cross-curricular learning, dual credit options, AP or IB participation, mentorships, student-directed learning, inquiry research, compacting, etc. • A personalized learning plan may or may not be necessary.	• Educational needs can generally be met, through collaboration with the classroom teacher, in the general education classroom. • Identification and programming are based on student need to develop exhibited potential ability areas • Identification is supported through a variety of assessments and should include quantitative and qualitative data • Programming examples could include flexible or faster pacing, cluster grouping, flexible ability grouping, tiered assignments, compacting, choice, time to work with other academically ready learners, etc. • Identification is flexible and reviewed annually. • Students will transition out when there is evidence that the need has been met or no longer exists. • Students will transition to Tier 2 or Tier 3 with multiple pieces of evidence showing cognitive ability and/or academic achievement. • A personalized learning plan is not needed at this level.
Students in all identification areas receive notification of optional opportunities that serve identification areas and student interests.		

Additional Considerations

Although the documented numbers do not reflect much of a success in identifying ELLs

for gifted services, Participant A believed it vital to highlight a secondary program that has

experienced success in the last four years. Annually, district administrators isolate the files on all

sixth graders who have been classified as coming from minority populations (free and reduced

lunch, ELLs, racial minorities). Those who have passed any test in the eightieth percentile, within the previous three years, and are proficient in math, are invited to attend English and math classes at the district's self-contained, gifted high school for the duration of their seventh-grade year. During that year, the selected students work through a high-school level curriculum of English and math. They also meet with a gifted coordinator weekly to study growth mindset (Dweck, 2010), career planning and other topics that promote the development of resiliency and grit. The rationale for this program, as described by Participant A, is to awaken in these students the desire for perseverance regardless of their circumstance and give them the ability to acknowledge their potential. Participant A excitedly described the growth seen in the above-mentioned students as, "exponential," and drawing highly positive feedback from the students themselves (Research conversation, October 23, 2019).

School District B

The administrator from District B that responded affirmatively to my invitation to participate is someone with whom I have had previous conversations. We emailed several times before we were able to commit to a date for an interview. Eventually, we did have our discussion over the speakerphone using an outside recording device. One follow-up email was sent but never answered (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This administrator will henceforth be referred to as Participant B.

Demographics and Funding

District B is also located in a state (State B) that mandates specialized programming for students identified as gifted and claims to provide adequate funding to do so. Neither the district nor the state has publicly disclosed the most current figures. According to a report released by

District B in 2018, there are upwards of 345,000 students attending regularly, and over 67,000 of those students are classified as English Language Learners (District B, 2018). Children for whom English is not their first, or most frequently used, language are included in State B's definition of a gifted child (Davidson Institute, 2019), and although the state does not offer more than vague guidance on how to screen and identify ELLs for gifted programs, legislation in the state exists, as of 2017, that requires the acceptance of previously acquired gifted identification, whether it occurred in a neighboring school district or a completely different state (NAGC, n.d.a). ELLs take up a good 19 percent of the overall student population in District B, speaking at least 56 different languages (District B, 2019a). Participant B reported that an impressive 9 percent of the seats in the district's gifted program are held by ELLs (Research conversation, October 30, 2019), although I could not find data online to support this claim. This evidence asserts that although approximately 12 percent of native English speakers are being identified as gifted, about 6 percent of ELLs are also being identified, which is well above the national average of 1.9 percent (Sanchez, 2017).

Participant B was part of a task force type team that executed a plan, which will be referred to as the 2006 Plan to protect district anonymity, back in June of 2006, designed to develop and implement nontraditional methods of identifying giftedness in all students, but specifically for those commonly passed-up by standardized testing: students of color, those living in poverty (defined by their free or reduced lunch status) and ELLs (Research conversation, October 30, 2019). The 2006 Plan showed great promise within the first year: A 26% increase in the number of home-based programs, finally providing gifted services in every elementary, middle and high school in District B; a 35% increase in the number of students of African-American decent identified for gifted programs; a 26% increase in the number of

Hispanic students identified for gifted programs; a 26% increase in total students receiving gifted services; a 16% increase in Advanced Placement (AP) courses offered in the district's senior high schools (Local news release, October 18, 2006). Unfortunately, like many districts in the United States, the years immediately following brought such drastic reductions in funding that the 2006 Plan, and the team that designed it, was dissolved. The work being done, being valued by the district and its administrators, was then handed off to school psychologists and on-site gifted specialists, with the hope that the positive results would continue. "We've been working with schools to make an impact, and we're hoping that we will see a little growth each year, [until] we actually reach what we feel is a very equitable distribution," (Participant B, research conversation, October 30, 2019). Participant B gave credit to their current superintendent for prioritizing the on-site training being done and being a supportive force behind the changes that have been implemented over the years in order to make sure no child is being missed in the gifted identification process (Research conversation, October 30, 2019).

Step 1: Referral

A training manual distributed by District B explains that before a student is referred for gifted evaluation, they must demonstrate high academic achievement (revealed by standardized test scores in the eighty-ninth percentile or high course grades), above-average creative output (artistic, literary, scientific, or mathematic), a rapid learning rate, the tendency to make insightful conclusions or exhibit outstanding leadership abilities (District B, 2013). Nominations are accepted from teachers, other school staff, parents, the student themselves, or even peers who have observed at least two of the above characteristics. Any ELL who has earned a grade of A or B in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or in-home language arts (i.e., Spanish

language arts, Haitian-Creole language arts) and mathematics is automatically screened for gifted (District B, 2019b).

For teachers to be successful in identifying children with gifted potential, professional development is necessary (Johnsen, 2018; Siegle et al., 2016). Similar to State A, State B does not require general education teachers to have any pre-service training in gifted education (NAGC, n.d.a), so the burden falls on each independent district to educate teachers post-contract. District B agrees with researchers (Card & Guiliano, 2016; Felder et al., 2015), that the antidote to bias in the identification process is teacher education, and thus considers teacher education the highest priority. According to Participant B, professional development is more vital than any purchased testing or screening instrument the district uses, when it comes to pursuing equity in the gifted program. District B educates teachers on the differing characteristics of children who are gifted with meetings during the academic year that may only be an hour and a half long, and with a larger, convention-type seminar during the summer. Often, Participant B conducts the meetings in person. "I tell teachers, 'Let's take a look at this kid. What's different about this kid from the other kids that you teach, [in terms of] cultural differences? What are some other things that we can look at for those children?'" (Research conversation, October 30, 2019). During the summer professional development courses, District B seizes the opportunity to further educate its counselors and administrators as well, providing directed instruction with the cooperation of their school psychologists (Participant B, research conversation, October 30, 2019).

Another program enlisted by District B to encourage equity in their gifted program is called the TEAM program. With this program, the district commits to Teaching Enrichment Activities Mindfully (TEAM) in elementary schools predominantly attended by minorities, by providing instruction on higher order thinking skills and assisting students in becoming more

successful in school, overall. Their objective is, "to develop students' critical and creative thinking skills and develop strategies capable of revealing hidden talents in diverse students," (District B, 2020). By doing this, District B believes that they are giving a better chance to students with high potential, making it even more possible for a gifted ELL to be identified.

Step 2: Testing

A profile for the student is then created by teachers and parents to include any data, both quantitative and qualitative (Felder et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2007), that demonstrates the student's exceptional ability and their need for gifted services. A required part of this portfolio is a checklist, which identifies qualities typically seen in children who are gifted, organized into three categories: learning, motivation and leadership. The checklist must be completed by a teacher but may be completed by several teachers. If the checklist shows most of the behaviors are demonstrated by the student in question, a team of teachers and administrators, along with at least one parent, meets at the student's school to discuss moving forward with gifted evaluation. ELLs that are referred for gifted will also need to have included a completed William's Scale for Creativity (Williams, 1972), and the appropriate Plan B Gifted Matrix form for their grade level (District B, 2019b).

With a parent's consent, the school evaluates the student for giftedness by using an intelligence test, often referred to as an IQ test. While most public-school districts in the United States purchase and use an intelligence test to assess the intellectual ability of referred students (Broderson et al., 2017), District B boasts that it has purchased various IQ tests (District B, 2019b). The rationale behind this is that while IQ tests, in general, have been exposed as biased toward certain minority subgroups (Johnsen, 2018; McCluskey, 2017; Siegle et al., 2016),

having a licensed psychologist hand-select a test for each specific student may reduce bias and increase the validity of the student's score. Additionally, while native English-speaking students are required to receive an IQ test score of 130 to be identified as gifted, ELLs are accepted into the gifted program with a minimum score of 112, contingent upon the appropriate amount of supporting qualitative data (District B, 2019b).

Step 3: Placement

Students are identified using a tiering system, but the number of tiers and the definition of each were not shared by District B. Depending on which tier a student is aligned with, they are then serviced through pull-out instruction or assigned to self-contained classrooms, taught by a certified teacher of the gifted (District B, 2019b).

School District C

The district selected to be District C was actually the second choice of this project, but after reviewing the online statistics and demographics of the first choice, I elected not to use them in the study. District C's administrator contacted me by email, requesting the option of answering my questions via email, instead of over the telephone or by videoconferencing software, due to their inflexible schedule. I agreed, in accordance with Marshall and Rossman's guidance (2016), grateful for the participation, even though I was aware this would limit the amount of data I would be able to retrieve from District C. One follow-up email was sent with clarifying questions and responded to immediately (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This administrator will henceforth be referred to as Participant C.

Demographics and Funding

Evaluation for gifted programming and the execution of District C's gifted program itself are both mandated and funded by State C (NAGC, n.d.a). Although exact figures were not disclosed, District C explained that the funding is calculated per gifted-identified student and depends on the category (1 or 2) in which each gifted student is placed upon identification (Participant C, personal communication, December 05, 2019). State C is yet another state that does not name English Language Learners in their definition of what a gifted child looks like (Davidson Institute, 2019), not excluding them, per se, but leaving the individual districts responsible for developing their own inclusionary policies.

The entire student body in District C numbers approximately 45,000, of which 13,700 have been identified as ELL (District C, 2017). District C reports that many languages are spoken in their district, with about 40 percent of their students speaking Spanish at home (District C website, 2020). ELLs comprise about 30 percent of the overall student population and about 19 percent of the gifted program in District C (Participant C, personal communication, December 5, 2019). For comparison's sake, while 11 percent of native English speakers (NES) are being identified as gifted in District C, about 6 percent of ELLs are also being identified, which is well above the national average of 1.9 percent (Sanchez, 2017). These numbers are particularly impressive when considering how state policy discourages the identification of ELLs for gifted.

Step 1: Referral

Because State C dictates that only students scoring in the top three percent be identified as gifted (Davidson Institute, 2019), with exceptions made for first and second graders, a student begins their school career with a ticking clock. Three years ago, in the interest of equity, District

C installed universal screening in the form of the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test/Second Edition (NNAT2) (Naglieri, 2008), to circumvent this restrictive state directive. All first graders, ELLs and native speakers of English alike, take the NNAT2 within the first few weeks of school. This permits schools to gather preliminary data on the students with highest potential and organize portfolio contents for consideration before state policy demands a specific test score. Peters & Matthews (2016) defended universal screening of this nature as the most effective and equitable practice in gifted identification. Establishing this district-wide practice is what Participant C considers the biggest contributing factor in identifying more ELLs for gifted programming. "Since it is a nonverbal test, we feel like we identify more ELL students than other [cognitive] ability tests would," (Participant C, personal communication, December 05, 2019).

Students in District C may also be recommended for gifted evaluation by teacher referral, as is most commonly the case in public schools across the country (Allen, 2017; Callahan et al., 2013), including districts A and B, which suggests all educators be knowledgeable about the qualities of a gifted student, regardless of their cultural background or language acquisition status (Siegle et al., 2016). Because State C requires general education teachers to receive training in gifted education (NAGC, n.d.a), schools in District C do not have on-site gifted coordinators. Instead, each campus employs a Gifted Site Champion (GSC) who attends the state's annual gifted conference and the district's targeted professional development throughout the academic year. The GSC may be any existing faculty member: media specialist, classroom teacher, administrator, etc., who collaborates with each identified student's classroom teacher to create differentiated lessons and focused projects, in addition to their regular duties (Participant C, personal communication, December 05, 2019).

Similar to districts A and B, District C is also authorized by their state to accept referrals for gifted evaluation from parents as well as teachers (Davidson Institute, 2019). District C translates all literature for parents (Krugman & Iza, 2014) in an effort to illuminate the rights of the student and the parent throughout the referral and evaluation processes (Participant C, personal communication, December 05, 2019).

Step 2: Testing

Akin to District A, and in alignment with suggestions from multiple researchers (McCluskey, 2017; Renzulli, 2004; Sternberg, 2017), District C does not employ the use of intelligence testing in their schools (Participant C, personal communication, February 20, 2020). However, per state policy, nationally normed, standardized tests continue to be the most common means by which a student is identified for District C's gifted program (Davidson Institute, 2019).

Step 3: Placement

Once identified, a student is placed into two separate categories; Category 1: the students who score in the top 3 percent and receive full funding from State C for their programming, or Category 2: students who did not perform in the top 3 percent on a standardized test, but qualified for District C's gifted program with their scores on the NNAT2 or with other qualitative data, as reviewed above. District C only receives partial funding for students identified as Category 2 (Participant C, personal communication, February 20, 2020), which may discourage teachers from referring students who are unlikely to have lower scores. However, any student who has been previously identified as gifted in a neighboring school district will be admitted to District C's program without having to retest, as stipulated by State C (NAGC, n.d.a).

Table 2: *Summary of all three districts*

	A	**B**	**C**
ELL included in state definition of GT		X	
% of total students designated ELL	22	19	30
% of GT students designated ELL	1.5	9	19
Translated parental communication	X		X
Referral accepted from persons other than classroom teacher	X	X	X
Universal screening	CogAT 2nd grade		NNAT2 1st grade
Achievement testing	85th percentile	89th percentile	required score not specified
IQ testing		112 min. score	
Norms referenced	building	unspecified	national
Qualitative data accepted as qualifying evidence	X	X	X
Tiered identification	3 tiers	number unspecified	2 tiers
Professional Development specific to GT	annual and monthly	annual and periodical throughout the year	only GSC attends

Drawing Conclusions

In reflecting upon the data, I revisited the questions that framed this research:

1. ***"What strategies do districts with diverse populations use to modify traditional methods of gifted identification for the purpose of increasing opportunity for English Language Learners?"***

Districts A, B and C exploit a variety of nontraditional methods in order to more accurately identify ELLs for gifted education, as suggested by researchers (Felder, et al., 2015; Frasier, 1997; Iowa Dept. of Education & Belin-Blank Center, 2008; Johnsen, 2018). For example, district A employs universal screening (Broderson et al., 2017) for all second graders and allows for qualitative data to be used as evidence, while foregoing the traditional IQ test (Participant A, research conversation, October 23, 2019). District B does not use a universal screening instrument for students but does adjust the minimum scores required for achievement and IQ tests (Johnsen, 2018), to accommodate ELLs. Qualitative data is also accepted in District B as evidence, but only in conjunction with an IQ score that aligns with the adjusted minimum (Participant B, research conversation, October 30, 2019). District C screens all first graders with a nonverbal instrument (Johnsen, 2018; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2007) and does accept qualitative data if collected and analyzed before their third-grade year. A standardized test is employed for identification but chosen specifically for the student by an expert, in an effort to make the results more valid for ELLs (Participant C, personal communication, December 05, 2019).

Each district exercises strategies that have been touted by researchers as best practices for identifying ELLs, as previously noted in this paper, however the variety of ways in which they do so reveals the gaps that still exist. The data has reinforced the claims made by Harris et al.

(2007), that there is no actionable guidance, neither coming from the states nor from the national level, on the most effective methods for identifying gifted ELLs. The best direction a district receives is a vague suggestion on how to assess, and if they are lucky, how to actually identify gifted English language learners. Not only is this evidenced in the diversity among each district's policies regarding the identification of ELLs, but also in the demographics of their gifted programs. For example, districts A, B and C all acknowledge qualitative data as evidence of giftedness (Felder et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2007), accept referrals from parents as well as classroom teachers (Davidson Institute, 2019; Ford & Grantham, 2003), and pour into the professional development of their educators (Allen, 2017; Felder et al., 2015; Ford, 2010), yet the percent of ELLs they are identifying differs greatly. It is the lack of research-based guidance at the state and national levels that render these commonalities invalid.

2. ***"What role does teacher education play in the identification of gifted English Language Learners and how is this influenced by funding?"***

As previous research has shown, teacher education is vital to the identification process (Allen, 2017; Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Harradine et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2005; Ryser, 2018a; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007). Targeted professional development increases awareness (Ford, 2010; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012), and the overall likelihood of referral for ELLs (Briggs et al., 2008; Ryser, 2018a). I wonder why, when the research says otherwise, the data does not show three districts abounding in overwhelming numbers of identified ELLs.

If I look through the lens of Adichie (2009), and her cautions against using a single story to define a person, it may be that despite the professional development workshops and the emails coming from the district, teachers have already made up their own minds about what giftedness

looks like. It may be that the story to which teachers have already married themselves is the one about the student who does not speak English, and they do not have room for any other stories (Allen, 2017).

District A prioritizes the personalization of professional development by population, by grade-level and by building. They contact educators on a monthly basis to make sure they are receiving some kind of cultural content constantly, relevant to gifted education, not only during the summer seminars (Participant A, research conversation, October 23, 2019). While reviewing this data, I wondered why the district putting the most effort into teacher education had the lowest percentage of ELLs being identified. One explanation could be that, while the district is conducting needs assessments to better tailor their professional development, schools may not be reporting that they have a need for further education in the gifted identification of ELLs. Principals may not realize the need exists and therefore are unable to offer feedback to the district, requesting appropriate resources (Siegle et al., 2016).

Anzaldúa's explanation of the way social boundaries are constructed by labels and our ability to see a person on only one side or the other (1987), brings to light the possibility that teachers may not fully understand that giftedness and language-learning are not mutually exclusive. Baum & Owen (2004) suggested that there may be upwards of 300,000 students in the United States who are gifted yet also represent some other exceptionality (as cited in Felder et al., 2015). Moore et al. (2005) named this as the reasoning behind their urgings of school districts to address deficit thinking and bias along with cultural diversity during professional development. Stereotypes and low expectations are not always able to be overcome by reading lists of characteristics and often need more attention (Allen, 2017; Felder et al., 2015; Ford, 2010; Johnsen, 2018; Young & Hemer-Patnode, 2010).

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Another justification for the low numbers of ELLs, in spite of the attention to teacher education, may be that the schools simply are not implementing the material. Administrators get behind schedule. Teachers are busy. An email in an inbox may be read or deleted. The quantity of material dispersed by a district makes no difference if it is not being understood and put into practice.

Because funding seems to be an inescapable issue in education, often districts must be creative in the way they educate classroom teachers. District A utilizes email to impart agenda upon faculty monthly (Participant A, research conversation, October 23, 2019), while District C assigns professional development responsibilities to a representative from each school, who then reports back to other teachers with district communications regarding gifted students (Participant C, personal communication, December 05, 2019). Participant B reported often driving to schools herself, squeezed in between meetings, to offer direction in the gifted identification of ELLs (Research conversation, October 30, 2019). Again, the lack of clear guidance from the boards of education at the state and national levels, on how exactly to facilitate professional development, leaves commonalities difficult to discover.

Opportunities for further research

The primary limitation for this study involves the sample. Because this research sought to study only districts located in states that mandate and fully fund gifted education, the sample was small, and the results cannot be assumed to be widely generalizable (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Future research should investigate districts in all eight states that include ELLs in their definition of giftedness, or only districts that are all reporting high percentages of ELLs in their gifted programs. Additionally, being that participants contributed of their own free will, under the promise of anonymity, this study only corroborated their claims with publicly shared, online

data. Future research should take this into account and interview more than one administrator or include a participant at the school level in each district, as well.

Another limitation that became apparent is the possible gap between district mandate and school practice. Prior research has suggested a lack in cohesiveness between state mandate and district policy (Shaunessy, 2003), so it would not be a stretch to assume that what the districts in this study are commanding may not be carried out at the school level exactly to standard. Research in the future should survey teachers or principals (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), anonymously, examining to what degree the school is instituting district policies regarding professional development and the gifted identification of ELLs.

Furthermore, this study did not inquire into the varied levels of ability each district's identified ELLs demonstrated. The gifted program in one district could include ELLs who would not still be branded ELL in another district (Ortiz, 2019). This could account for the varied results between districts despite some similar practices. Further research should question participants about ELL classifications and if possible, study cases that operate under similar criteria.

Closing Recommendations

Reflecting on the process and the research that was done for this project, I am compelled to mention the tensions I encountered. The near impossibility of finding district statistics online and the way potential participants would abscond the opportunity to give their students a voice spoke volumes to me. After participants had committed, there were still some interview questions that did not want to be answered and there were follow-up emails that were never returned. I wondered why it felt like nobody wanted to tell the truth. What was it about this truth that made it frightening? Could it be that schools are exhausted by the blame that already circles

around them, eager to find cause to shut down programs and take away funding? Could it be that the focus on identifying a problem without sufficient suggestion of a cure keeps teachers from asking for help and the lack of state and national guidance keeps administrators from responding with aid? I can understand the fear, as we are all a little jaded from the pointing fingers, but the risk of succumbing to that fear, the continued paucity of guidance, the lack of accountability and the deficiency of tools, is not worth the safety of silence.

As teachers, we stand on the front lines daily, with hands-on access to children of all cultural backgrounds and languages. We promise to teach them, from behind or ahead or somewhere in the middle. We can neither wait for changes to be made at the national level nor for national organizations to distribute what wisdom they deem worthy. We cannot wait for the state to issue legislation that enlists some kind of "best fit" policy. What we can do is listen. We can read and research and ask those around us who may know better than we do. Krugman and Iza (2014) suggested that students receive the most equitable experience in school when classroom teachers, parents, ESOL teachers and gifted coordinators collaborate on behalf of the child, all offering their own expertise, all the while filling in the gaps in each other's paperwork. This is something we *can* do, and I would urge all educators to make that extra phone call, write that note or schedule that meeting. Educators should also let their principals or professional development coordinators know that they want to be better informed on effective identification strategies for gifted ELLs. ESOL teachers should encourage their school administrators to host multicultural trainings and workshops to reduce deficit thinking and inspire classroom teachers to see their students as precious and unique humans about whom there are many stories written.

District administrators are often tasked with an impossible feat and may need to go beyond their state's board of education in search of equitable strategies for identifying gifted

ELLs. Allen (2017) posited that ESOL teachers may be a great liaison between the district and the school regarding culturally sensitive professional development. Furthermore, the state's exclusion of ELLs should not keep districts from including them in their own definitions. Frequent visits to schools or surveys of the faculty can be done to ensure research-based policies are being executed as proposed.

Finally, I would implore the schools of education at universities to include teaching the gifted in their curriculum for pre-service teachers. Gifted is easily worked into special education instruction, and an awareness of cultural biases and deficit thinking can be addressed in multicultural education courses. The knowledge is vital for educators to possess before they are in the field and as previously noted, teachers cannot depend on their schools to provide this training.

Just as we would not ask a surgeon to operate without a scalpel, we cannot expect teachers and administrators to identify English language learners for gifted programming without the proper tools. The United States is growing more diverse by the day, and our student populations are looking less and less like they did the first day we stepped foot into our classrooms. If we go beyond the legislation and the policies handed down to us and choose to take this opportunity to cross barriers and listen to all the stories our students have to tell, not only will we fulfill the vow we took when we became educators, but we will become aware of the best ways to provide the challenge and rigor all students deserve.

Appendix

Guided Interview Questions

Examples of questions that may be asked are as follows:

- What motivated your district to make changes in the way they identified gifted children?

- Which screening method do you feel is the most successful in identifying gifted ELLs?

- How does your district educate its personnel on the needs of gifted children?

- How does your district address the funding needs of gifted education?

- How well do you feel the demographics of your gifted programs represent that of the entire school population?

- Why do you feel your district has been successful in identifying ELLs for gifted programs?

*Also requested:

- a summary of the process of identifying a gifted student for whom English is not their first language

- percent of student population enrolled in your district's gifted program

- percent of gifted students, currently enrolled in your district's gifted program, who have been identified as ELL

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