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Educator Perceptions of Gifted English Language Learners

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EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTED ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A Specialist Project
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Teacher Education
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Specialist in Education

By
Michelle Lynch

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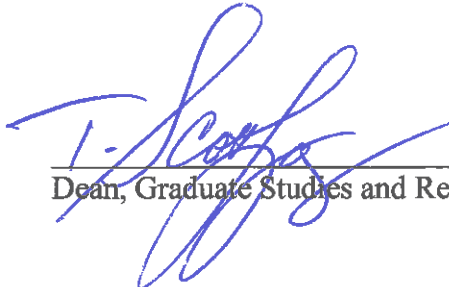
EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTED ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Date Recommended April 11, 2018


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I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Jason Lynch and my children Kelly Lynch and Ryan Lynch who supported me throughout this entire process with love and understanding.

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Directed by: Julia Roberts, Antonia Szymanski, and Janet Tassell

School of Teacher Education

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This paper explores educator perceptions of gifted and talented (GT) English language (ELL) students. This study identifies barriers for identification and service for GT/ELL students and highlights ways to support students through current efforts for students who fit these criteria. Educators from two elementary schools were interviewed in this qualitative study. The schools were chosen due to their high population of ELL students. The roles of professional development (PD) and best practices for identification of underrepresented students are discussed. Five main themes emerged from interviews of educators that work with GT/ELL students. The themes are obstacles, perception, referral, professional development, and, modification.

Literature Review

Identifying and educating gifted and talented (GT) students who are also English Language Learners (ELL) are important in school districts across the United States. Numbers of ELL students enrolled in public schools have grown at an exponential rate, especially in the past few years (U.S. Department of Education Report on Student Demographics). With student population becoming more diverse and teacher population remaining the same, the gifted English Language Learner is often overlooked simply due to lack of awareness coupled with little to no professional development being offered in some school districts. According to the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights data, the percentage of ELL students enrolled in gifted programs was at 2.7 percent for the school year 2011-2012. This report indicated that there are 3,189,757 students enrolled in gifted and talented programs. Only 86,867 of that total are English Language Learners. The total population of ELL students was 9.6 percent, which is 4,745,788 with 99.9% of United States public schools reporting. This literature review will explore and answer the questions: What is the status of professional development support for GT and ELL educators? What are educator perceptions of Gifted and Talented, English Language Learners? What are barriers for identification of GT/ELL learners? How can educators support GT/ELL learners?

Role of Professional Development

In 2017, the Kentucky Teaching Empowering Learning and Leading (TELL) survey results were published. The TELL Survey is a biennial survey that offers every certified educator in the state the opportunity to provide input on teaching conditions that can be used to inform school, district, and state improvements. It is an anonymous survey

as no questions refer to an individual educator or administrator, no questions ask about specific subject areas or grade levels. The TELL survey is important to complete since the TELL initiative helps state and district leaders gather, document, and analyze educator perceptions of teaching and learning conditions in schools and districts. The results can be used to plan improvements that include professional development for teachers and school leaders.

The overall 2017-response rate for the TELL survey was 91%. These results found that 43% of the state's educators said they need professional learning in Special Education (gifted and talented) to teach their students more effectively with 11% of educators reporting that they have had ten clock hours or more of professional learning in gifted and talented education in the past two years. For English Language Learning (ELL), 38% of educators need professional development to teach their students more effectively with 11% reporting that they have had ten clock hours or more of professional learning in ELL respectively. In contrast, 67% of educators said they have had ten or more clock hours of professional learning in their content area with 36% reporting that they need professional learning to teach their students more effectively. This data illustrates a need for increased professional learning on topics such as ELL and Special Education (gifted and talented) as opposed to more professional learning in their specific content area.

Quality professional development is important. Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, and Dixon (2007) found in their study that despite having attended multiple in-service professional development days on gifted education and having taught identified gifted students, the teachers did not appear to have a well-developed understanding of

giftedness and its characteristics. More specifically, these teachers did not appear to have a clear understanding of how giftedness may manifest in minority and/or economically disadvantaged students. This finding is important to note since students in these groups are historically underrepresented and lack of awareness in educators can hinder gifted student educational opportunities.

More professional development opportunities are needed for teachers to reach not only ELL/GT students-but also all gifted students. Modifications need to be made to existing identification criteria in order to accommodate the growing ELL population. Esquierdo and Arreguin-Anderson (2012) discussed the importance of GT teachers becoming aware and being trained in the characteristics of gifted bilingual students and in turn, ELL teachers being trained to identify giftedness in children along with gifted education philosophy, instructional approaches, and best practices.

Best Practices in Identification

Identification opens the initial door for the gifted student. Szymanski and Shaff, (2013) noted, “As gatekeepers to programming for gifted learners, teachers play an influential role in the educational experience of diverse, gifted students” (p. 22). Exceptional behaviors must be noticed by educators associated with giftedness. Without a teacher nomination, the data gathering phase for a student to be identified gifted and talented most likely will not occur. While parent nominations are accepted, students who are English Language Learners often are not afforded this opportunity due to the language barrier involved in this process (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). This study emphasizes the incredible impact teachers have on identification and how knowledge of exceptional behaviors of diverse, gifted students must be known and practiced in the

educational setting. When teachers do not have awareness of how giftedness can occur in all students, identification suffers. Furthermore, when parents are not empowered with information and a knowledge of the English language, students miss gifted educational opportunities.

Proper identification needs to encompass all aspects of the child, not just reflect performance on a particular test on a particular day. According to Harris, Rapp, Martinez, and Plucker (2007) the traditional reliance on English-only standardized tests clearly discriminates against ELL students, yet surprisingly little information is available on whether using versions of common instruments in languages other than English leads to higher identification rates. When identifying gifted learners, educators need to rely on multiple pieces of data. Baldwin (2005) wrote that multiple measures to analyze the entire child should be used, such as checklists and student work, and that attitudes and stereotypes need to change and look beyond the language barrier. Outdated identification practices have not been revised to take into account the linguistic and cultural population that is prevalent today. The total picture of the child needs to go beyond the usual testing that takes place.

Lohman (2005) states that a better policy to make decisions about potential for academic excellence using the most valid and reliable attitude measures for all students is to compare each student's scores only to the scores of other students who share similar learning opportunities or background characteristics. The predictors of achievement in reading, mathematics, social studies, and science are the same for White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian American students with the consequences of using a common test with a common cut score outweigh the benefits of ease of use. This practice institutes a

more accurate comparison of diverse students and allows educators to gain a true perspective on how each child performs in accordance to his/her peers. The benefit to all students is an increased fairness to the traditional achievement tests.

As our population becomes more diverse, there is a greater need to expand our definition of identification to include all students. Pereira and Gentry (2013) emphasized the need to identify high potential learners from underserved populations for gifted education services. They found that the high potential ELL students studied in grades two through six enjoyed school, had positive interactions with peers and teachers, and were committed to doing well in school. Results of this study also revealed that the participants were well integrated in school. When identification occurs, it has the potential to influence all populations of gifted students in a beneficial way. For our high potential ELL students, the provisions of proper identification and services can result in higher motivation and more opportunities.

The importance of the educator role in identification is paramount. Teachers observe and spend the most time with students. As Szymanski and Shaff (2013) stated, “Racially and culturally diverse students may pose an even bigger dilemma for teachers because language or cultural differences may mask the characteristics that an untrained professional may associate with giftedness” (p. 21). Awareness is the key for educators that work with underserved populations. When teachers are knowledgeable about the characteristics of how giftedness emerges within each population of students, they are empowered to recognize gifts and talents that student may possess.

Differentiated identification and services can also address the problem of equity and excellence in identification. Peters and Engerrand (2016) assert that with any

differentiated identification system, one in which the identification procedures have been in any way modified to further the goal of equity, comes a need for differentiated services (p. 168). Characteristics of gifted ELL students are often different from the characteristics of students who were born in U.S. culture. Identification requires a holistic approach, as students may not be able to perform English language tests yet, but may have the potential for incredible gifts (Siegle, et al., 2016).

Proper identification should be on a rolling basis through the school year to account for students new to the district. Harris et al. (2007) advised that the screening process should be ongoing throughout the school year so that migrant and immigrant students who enter the school system at different times in the school year have a chance to participate in the assessment and identification process. In addition to the ongoing screening process, an active team of school personnel that includes gifted and talented, ELL teachers, parents, and general education teachers should review data. Testing students at a fixed time each year could delay services and could deny opportunities for students all due to the timing of when they enter the district.

Obstacles in Identification and Service

Gifted identification is a complex process with barriers in place that can hinder underrepresented populations being identified. Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008) stated that few studies or literature reviews have focused on teacher referral and identification of gifted students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Negative stereotypes can present an obstacle for identification. Barriers identified were testing and assessment instruments that contain biases along with policies and procedures that are both indefensible and have a disparate impact on culturally and linguistically diverse

students. Other barriers identified were static definitions and theories of gifted that consider cultural differences and ignore how students' background influence their opportunities to demonstrate skills and abilities, as well as lack of teacher preparation in both gifted education and cultural diversity. With the multitude of barriers that exist for identification of GT/ELL students, new protocols need to be explored.

Pereira and de Oliveira (2015) discussed that proficiency levels can provide valuable information to teachers on how to plan for instruction of ELLs. The most commonly used instrument is ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State: World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment [WIDA], 2014). ACCESS is a large-scale English language proficiency assessment given to K-12 students who have been identified as ELLs. The researchers suggested that high potential ELLs at lower levels of English proficiency may require instructional modifications in order to participate in advanced programs. For students at higher levels of English proficiency, teachers may find it easier to identify potential in these students. When the language barrier is lifted, opportunities for identification can increase.

Educator awareness helps to ensure that students are identified fairly. Pendarvis (2009) conducted a case study to encourage more teachers to refer students for evaluation, especially students who belonged to minority racial groups or who were economically disadvantaged. The study found that equitable policy applied consistently seems essential to equitable programs. Due to the study, wording for the new gifted identification policy was changed from "and" to "or" to ensure that further alternatives for children who may be even more diverse in their experiences, circumstances, or nature

than most of the children in the study. Modifications are needed in our current definition of gifted and talented students in order to avoid exclusion.

Teacher Perception

With teachers serving such a pivotal role in the identification process, their perceptions need to be in accordance with the latest research to ensure no student group is excluded. Educators are held accountable for documenting adequate yearly progress, and resources are allocated to make sure there is growth in both academic achievement and English language proficiency. However, there are also ELL's who enter school as bright and intelligent with a readiness for learning that often surpasses that of their classmates (Castellano, 2005).

Educator perceptions are vital to providing the opportunity for successful identification of all student groups. Szymanski, Croft, and Goder (2017) found a systematic way to understand what teachers view as the most important goals of a gifted program can also be an indicator of teachers' attitudes by creating the Determining Attitudes Toward Ability (DATA) instrument. Researchers can use the information from the DATA to compare services provided in a district and programming goals among teachers in that district, investigate trends, and create models to test various pathways of achieving these goals (p. 29). It can be difficult to gauge teacher perceptions, experiences, and attitudes; therefore, an instrument to provide this information can serve to improve gifted opportunities for all students, especially those from underrepresented populations.

Teachers' perceptions can be well developed with adequate training to see potential in their students. Sisk (2005) found that if educators viewed English as a Second

Language (ESL) students as having bilingual and bicultural skills, rather than viewing them with a deficit view, culturally and linguistically different students could be considered as a cultural resource (p. 10). With proper professional development, teachers will know what to look for when working with a high ability English language learner who could potentially be identified as gifted and talented.

Szymanski and Shaff (2013) found from their study of teachers that work with gifted diverse students that three themes emerged. The teachers experience differences in training to work with diverse, low income students and with gifted students; teachers use personal beliefs to compensate for their lack of training in identifying and accommodating gifted learners and that teachers perceive barriers for diverse students participating in gifted programming. Teacher perception can either be a barrier or a positive aspect when identifying and working with the gifted/ELL learner. Changing public school demographics, demand teacher perceptions follow suit by exploring characteristics of gifted students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Castellano (2005), stated that gifted children transcend race, ethnicity, and linguistic differences along with poverty, geography, and familial situations and it would be a disservice not to nurture the gifts or potential of students who would benefit and excel in gifted education programming.

Neumeister, et al. (2007) asserted in their study that for teachers to be successful in referring students, they need a solid understanding of the characteristics found in gifted children (p. 492). The results of their survey indicated that teachers could benefit from professional development in multicultural education in general. Reeves (2006) found subject-area high school teachers indicated a neutral to slightly positive attitude toward

ELL inclusion, a somewhat positive attitude toward coursework modification, a neutral attitude toward professional development for working with ELL's and educator misconceptions regarding how second languages are learned. To achieve an understanding of gifted characteristics in ELL students, professional development could serve to eliminate any preconceived notions educators may have.

When gifted education is mandated by the state, it can make a difference in teacher perceptions. deWet and Gubbins (2011) led a study that attempted to assess teachers' beliefs about culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse (CLED) students on a national scale. They found that whether teachers worked in a state with a mandate for gifted education or not made a significant difference in how they responded to the benefits and assessment factors. They found that this might be because teachers who worked in states with a mandate for gifted education were influenced by the constraints put on CLED students by existing identification procedures and programming options. Teachers from such states were more likely to have had training in gifted education and therefore might be trained to be more convinced of the efficacy and usefulness of existing identification procedures.

Increased collaboration between classroom teachers; English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers, and gifted specialists could promote more conversations about students and would result in a higher rate of collaboration on gifted referral documents and evaluation checklists. Allen (2017) explored the role teacher perceptions play in the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted programming in a qualitative study. In addition, the research made clear that the over reliance on test scores could be detrimental as the test scores may cause teachers to

perceive students' abilities to be lower than they actually are. Allen noted that the language barrier could affect learning as it challenges students and teachers, therefore making students' abilities (p. 82).

Possible Solutions

Educators' perceptions can be beneficial or detrimental when it comes to identifying and serving our gifted students. Szymanski, et al. (2017) emphasized the need to understand and enhance teachers' attitudes toward nurturing gifted learners. New research and instruments can bridge the gap between accurate identification and teacher perceptions. Increasing our awareness of the unique characteristics and needs of the gifted child can guide educators toward more inclusion of underrepresented populations along with teaching strategies that can enhance learning.

Expansion of teaching techniques and adding a giftedness category to reflect the strengths of GT/ELL students are two ideas that are considered. The idea for an expanded definition of giftedness was presented by Valdes (2003) when immigrant bilingual children who served as interpreters were studied, since the skills these young interpreters use to translate effectively for parents, teachers, and other people can be a sign of giftedness. She suggested adding Linguistic/Analytic giftedness to the already established categories of giftedness. Uresti, Goertz, and Bernal (2002) studied how a teacher in an inclusive classroom can use several techniques that will facilitate all students' general learning while accommodating the potentially gifted child. Curriculum compacting, curriculum differentiation, and independent study are a few examples.

Resources to aid educators working with GT/ELL students are available to help. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) *Pre-K-Grade 12 Programming*

Standards (NAGC, 2010) include a culturally responsive curriculum as one of the ways educators can respond to the increasing multicultural nature of schools and gifted programs. The combination of gifted and multicultural resources for teachers that have not had the opportunity for professional development can serve to improve programs for students.

Differentiation is a possibility explored by Latz and Adams (2011).

Differentiation is an educational philosophy that acknowledges differences among learners. Differentiation takes into account how an educator understands the academic, social, emotional, and psychological needs of all students in the classroom. (p. 781).

Differing students, such as Gifted/ELL's differing needs require different content and pedagogical approaches. To further support differentiating instruction, Tomlinson, et al., (2016) found it important for teachers to consistently, defensibly, and vigorously adjust curriculum and instruction in response to student readiness, interest, and learning profile.

Implementation of differentiating techniques and identification strategies to enhance the educational experience of CLED students are needed. Neumeister, et al. (2007) asserted that with the population of minority students increasing in schools, this area of preservice education has promising opportunities for future research as educators strive to modify their programs to better prepare their students and address the needs of diverse students in the classroom (p. 495). Briggs, Reis, and Sullivan (2008) found three interventions or practices to support the academic achievement of CLED students at high levels in gifted programs. These interventions included implementation of identification strategies designed to include more CLED students, use of curriculum/instructional strategies, and the creation of professional development opportunities.

Conclusion

Harris et al. (2007) implied “the demographics of the United States are changing dramatically and more schools across the nation will be enrolling ELLs at increasing rates, successful identification of gifted and talented ELL students entails proactive work and visionary leadership” (p. 29).

Educator perceptions on gifted English language learners have been studied and suggestions for improvement to serve our students that fall into this category have emerged through the literature. The findings of the literature review show that increased professional development, collaboration between education professionals, and adjustments in the identification process need to be developed and implemented. The educators participating in this study give added insight to identifying and serving the growing population we are seeing in one school district.

Method

Qualitative methods were chosen to focus on a small group of educators who work with a diverse student population in one school district. The qualitative approach allowed for semi-structured interview questions designed around three main areas. The three headings entailed: professional development, identification, and obstacles. The background and experience of each educator are of note along with opportunities they have had for professional development in the areas of gifted education and English Language Learners (ELL). Their own experiences with identification of Gifted and Talented (GT) students were analyzed, and questions (see Appendix C) were designed to identify any obstacles that occur with the identification of gifted English Language Learners. There were three types of question sets consisting of approximately three to six questions on each heading. There were teacher questions intended for regular classroom teachers and ELL teachers, district level coordinator questions, and school curriculum coordinator questions.

From the semi-structured questions, interviews took place with nine educators. They consisted of the district gifted and talented coordinator, two English language learning teachers, two elementary curriculum coordinators, and four regular education teachers. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight regarding educators' perceptions of the identification of GT/ELL learners and to learn about current efforts aimed at increasing the ELL representation in Gifted and Talented Education.

The knowledge gained from the different perspectives of a small variety of educators who work directly with both Gifted and Talented and English Language Learners was helpful. The two elementary schools were suggested by the gifted and

talented coordinator for the school district as they both have the highest population of ELL's. These two schools are diverse and served as appropriate models for the study.

Context

The study took place in a large school district in a mid-sized city of the south-central United States. The total number of students enrolled in the district is approximately 14,500 (see Table 1).

Table 1
 2016-17 Data from School District

Student Data	Total District Population	Percentage District Population	GT Numbers	Percent of GT Population
Number of Students K-12	14,563	100%	2,994	21%
African American or Black Students	1,258	9%	114	4%
Hispanic Students	1,290	9%	112	4%
Asian Students	976	7%	856	85%
White Students (Not Hispanic)	10,318	71%	132	4%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	20	0%	1	0%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	53	0%	3	0%
Two or more races	648	4%	94	3%
Students with an IEP	1,700	12%	89	3%
English Language Learners	1,843	13%	46	2%
Free and Reduced Lunch Participants	8,133	56%	981	33%
Primary Students	4,571	31%	566	19%

Note: From District Report Card by Kentucky Department of Education, 2018.

The total population of students is 14,563, and GT total number is 2,994 for a total of 21% of the students identify as gifted and talented. The school district consists of 14 elementary schools, four middle schools, and six high schools. Two schools were focused on for this study, recommended by the gifted and talented coordinator. These schools were suggested due to their diverse enrollment and for the highest potential of GT/ELL students. (See Table 2)

Table 2

School Demographics K-6th Grade

Name of School	Number of Students	Active Gifted & Talented Including Primary Talent Pool	English Language Learners
School 1	753	92	266
School 2	752	94	303

Note: From District Report Card by Kentucky Department of Education, 2018.

Participants

The purpose of the research was to understand teachers’ perceptions regarding non-English speaking gifted and talented students. The perspective of regular educators was sought as well as the viewpoints of district leadership and school curriculum coordinators. The district gifted and talented coordinator works with the district’s 24 schools in grades K-12. The GT coordinator also coordinates services for the gifted population with 35 certified GT teachers in the district. One role of the Elementary Curriculum Coordinator (ECC) at each elementary school is to support teachers in identifying and serving the school population. Each ECC is required to obtain a Gifted and Talented Endorsement. The English Language Teachers are in charge of instructional

services for the students enrolled in each school. There are approximately five teachers at each grade level in the two schools studied.

The nine participants in this study were all non-Hispanic Caucasians. Two of the teachers worked exclusively with English Language Learners; two teachers taught 5th grade, one 4th grade, and one 3rd grade. The two ECC's interviewed work with grades Pre-K-6 in each school. The gifted coordinator works with the 35 certified teachers in the district. Each educator interviewed has over ten years of experience (See Table 3).

Table 3

Participants

Participant	Role	Gender	Certifications Held	Total Years in Education
P1	Regular Classroom Teacher-Grade 4	F	P-5th Grade	10
P2	ELL Teacher-Elementary	F	K-6, ESL, Reading	19
P3	Regular Education Teacher-Grade 5	F	K-6, Gifted Endorsement	18
P4	Curriculum Coordinator-Elementary	F	K-6, Gifted Endorsement	20
P5	Regular Education Teacher-Grade 5	F	National Board Certification, P-5, Gifted Endorsement, School Media Librarian	14
P6	ELL Teacher-Elementary	M	ESL	15
P7	Curriculum Coordinator-Elementary	F	Gifted and Talented Endorsement, Math 5-12, P-5, Teacher Leader Endorsement	19
P8	Gifted Coordinator-K-12	F	Gifted Endorsement, Principal, Supervisor of Instruction	28
P9	Regular Education Teacher-Grade 3	F	K-6	21

Document Collection Procedures

IRB approval from the university, approval from the district and the request for permission to research schools were submitted and approved at the district board of education meeting (see Appendix D). Once approval was granted to continue with the study, the gifted district coordinator referred me to the elementary curriculum coordinators of the two schools with the highest ELL population in the school district. Letters were sent to the principals of both schools as well as the teachers for interviews (see Appendix A).

Individual Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. (See Appendix C) Participants answered similar questions; however, depending on their role within the district, the answers were distinguished one from another. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes in length and conducted at either the central office or the elementary school where the educator was employed. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the author. The transcript was sent to each interviewee for review. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants.

The semi-structured interview questions were designed to be open-ended and flexible to give the educator the opportunity to elaborate on specific points of interest. Follow-up questions were asked during interviews to clarify information presented. Having the different question sets for each group of educators, district and curriculum coordinators, and teachers tailored the questions for each of the participants' situations in working with GT/ELL students.

Data Analysis Process

After transcribing interviews verbatim and; reading over twice, data were organized on an Excel spreadsheet, according to different identifying codes. A frequency analysis conducted before breaking the codes into smaller categories. The responses to the semi-structured interview questions were in use as a framework for the codes as each sentence from the answers was put into a specific group. The coding provided the ability to use smallest units possible to categorize data by isolating each sentence of each response.

After 604 lines of code emerged, a code summary table in Excel developed with original codes and then revised codes. The frequency of each code appeared during the process of identifying unique codes and revised codes. The number of initial codes totaled 370. The codes developed into smaller categories, and the total was 81. Finally, 20 different themes emerged from the data, which were then analyzed utilizing methods by Saldaña (2016) to narrow the themes to five main themes. An outside review of the initial and revised codes was conducted of the data by a fellow Educational Specialist student in gifted education.

Findings and Discussion

What are educators' perceptions of gifted and talented/English language learners? The answer to this question came from five central themes that emerged from the research. These themes are: a) obstacles b) perception c) referral d) professional development, and e) modification. The discussion on each theme follows.

Theme One: Obstacles

Obstacles defined as burdens that educators encounter while identifying and providing service to gifted and talented students. P1 noted, “The most interesting thing about ELL students is no one knows what exactly they can do until you can get through that language barrier, and once they've gotten it, then they take off, it is amazing.” The talents of an ELL student cannot emerge because of their lack of fluency in the English language. The challenge of communication can be detrimental to both student and teacher.

Educators need to understand a student to be able to identify the best learning path for that student. If the language barrier is present, this task is difficult. “The sole fact is that teachers are not looking at them being their strongest students because we are working on language acquisition. (It is harder for ELL/GT's to get noticed) because we are so focused on getting them to learn the English language” (P7). Gifted and talented students can go unnoticed because they cannot be heard or understood by the very people that can move them forward in their education. Identification opens the initial door for the gifted student. Szymanski and Shaff, (2013) noted “As gatekeepers to programming for gifted learners, teachers play an influential role in the educational experience of diverse, gifted students” (p. 22).

Many students can miss the opportunity for gifted identification due to cultural and language barriers. Identification requires a holistic approach, as students may not be able to perform English language tests yet, but may have the potential for incredible gifts (Siegle et al., 2016). “I am sure in my ten years; I'm sure I missed someone because I assumed since they couldn't talk like I do, they might not be able to do that.” (P1) What

is unfamiliar to educators can contribute to a student going unnoticed by teachers who could identify them for services.

Theme Two: Perception

Perception refers to a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something. Educators' perceptions of gifted and talented/English language learners are of extreme importance as the educator is the individual who can initiate changes in educational programs for the students. The more positive the perception, the more open to alternative methods of identification that can be available for GT/ELL students.

P5 noted, "We can't rely on our Elementary Curriculum Coordinator (ECC) to do it all, but the test scores can only tell you so much and especially for an ESL student, test scores may not tell you anything because they can't read the test."

This sentiment is the frustration shared by a classroom teacher who would like to identify more ELL's for the gifted and talented program. The test scores should only be one piece of the puzzle for each child. Multiple measures can be evaluated get a complete picture of the child. Preconceived notions can hinder a flexible mindset when focusing on gifts and talents of an ELL student.

"We are getting past that perception that they are not just gifted for the 45 minutes they are in the program a week, they are gifted all the time. For me in our district, it does not understand that just because they don't speak English, they aren't gifted, that's the number one thing." (P8)

Efforts are being employed to improve educator perceptions. Allen (2017) explored the role teacher perceptions play in the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted programming in a qualitative study. The research

made clear that over reliance on test scores could be detrimental as the test scores may cause teachers to perceive students' abilities to be lower than they actually are.

Collaboration between gifted specialists and teachers could help referrals. Difficulties can arise when identifying students who speak a different language or come from a culture different than ours. With increasing numbers of ELL students in our schools, investigation of new methods and teacher perception are the first steps towards understanding.

Teacher perception can determine opportunities for students. Educator exposure to techniques and experiences in identification gifted and talented, English language learners, they feel more confident in finding the best fit for these students. When their experience is limited, it can limit opportunities for students. Perception can have a positive effect. P3 stated, "I had one little boy come in 5th grade who spoke seven different languages, there is something more than just normal intellect there for him to be able to go between the languages." Sisk (2005) found that if educators viewed English as a Second Language (ESL), students as having bilingual and bicultural skills, rather than seeing them with a deficit view, culturally and linguistically different students could be considered as a cultural resource (p. 10). This teacher saw his ability to speak multiple languages as a sign of his intelligence rather than a deficit on standardized tests that could limit his opportunities.

Theme Three: Referral

Educators must be aware of the characteristics of gifted and talented students to initiate referrals for identification. Baldwin (2005) wrote that multiple measures to analyze the entire child should be used, such as checklists and student work and that

attitudes and stereotypes need to change and look beyond the language barrier. One test score should not determine a student's future.

“We have a special considerations form that goes with that, and the teacher can check they are ELL student when they are not hitting those 90's. They may even be in the 70's or 60's, but when it is clearly a language barrier and not an academic barrier, they use that special considerations form and they check that on the form, it goes on through.”

(P8)

Having a flexible perspective on identification can help to identify more ELL students for gifted and talented programs. Utilizing the special considerations form can open doors for students who otherwise would not have been given a second look due to their lack of English skills.

Neumeister et al. (2007) asserted in their study that for teachers to be successful in referring students, they need a solid understanding of the characteristics found in gifted children (p. 492). The results of their survey indicated that teachers could benefit from professional development in multicultural education in general. Educators also need a solid understanding of gifted education. P7 noted, “I have a couple of teachers who will instigate a referral, but they have had gifted and talented training and know what they are looking for.” Informed educators are beneficial for referring since they are knowledgeable about the characteristics needed to be present to initiate a referral.

Students can demonstrate giftedness using more than just a test score. “We have to have multiple sources for identification, with your ESL, that's where you get a little more creative in your ways to identify since you need so many samples.” (P3) When there is a language barrier, referrals can be more equitable for ELL students if they are

full in depth and breadth. Work samples, checklists, jot-downs, response lessons, and modifying instruction can all showcase a child's strengths.

ELL teachers and gifted and talented teachers have training in their specialty, but the regular classroom teacher also needs to be aware of what to look for in referring students. P3 noted, "The classroom teacher is responsible for the gathering of documentation, samples of work, surveys, questionnaires, and then the ECC's do any specific testing outside the regular classroom." The classroom teacher spends the most time with students during the school day and is often the first step in identification. Therefore it is essential that they have professional development to be aware of the characteristics of both GT and ELL students.

Theme Four: Professional Development

Professional development provides continued education to ensure that program offerings uphold accountability standards for all students. Professional development (PD) can provide the necessary training to identify students for the services they need. It is common to hear of separate training for gifted and talented-English language learners, but rarely are they heard of together in professional development offerings.

"We have had ELL training for years, and we had all that training but was never finding the gifted in the ELL, teachers know how to work with vocabulary and how to modify and that kind of thing and when the child picks up very quickly, but they don't take it beyond that." (P4)

With the numbers of ELL students increasing, it is becoming evident that combined professional development is needed. Szymanski and Shaff (2013) found that one area found to be lacking in preservice teacher preparation programs is the

identification and understanding of gifted learners. To achieve an understanding of gifted characteristics in ELL students, professional development could serve to eliminate any preconceived notions educators may have.

Esquierdo and Arreguin-Anderson (2012) discussed the importance of GT teachers is becoming aware and training in the characteristics of gifted bilingual students and ELL teachers being trained to identify giftedness in children along with gifted education philosophy, instructional approaches, and best practices.

P7 summarized, “There is plenty of professional development out there for meeting the needs of our normal run of the mill GT students, that we can easily identify, but eventually they are going to have to find a way to combine PD with the ELL in mind.”

Putting these two topics together for meaningful professional development more in the future could assist teachers in identification for our growing ELL population. More professional development opportunities are needed for teachers to reach not only ELL/GT students, but also all gifted students. Modifications need to be made to existing identification criteria in order to accommodate our growing ELL population.

One of the ELL teachers-(P6) interviewed for this study felt there was sufficient professional development in their area but said, “Gifted educators presented a professional development once that I attended that was very meaningful PD for me because I'm a little deficient in that area.” Educators want practical professional development where they can learn about students they will encounter in their classes, but may not have much information on due to their specialty. With only 11% of educators

saying they had ten or more clock hours in how to teach gifted and talented students as well as English language learners effectively, there is a definite need.

Theme Five: Modification

Modifications and strategies are tactics used by educators on classwork and assessments to find the full potential of each student. Modifications help English language learners in the classroom by removing barriers that may be caused by the language difference.

P1 noted, “I think if we just continue to try to bridge that gap, we all do that, I mean I do that, I change all assignments, I change all assessments, to try to figure out what they can tell me, throw in pictures when I can, and that helps me figure out where they are.”

ELL students can understand if pictures are used to describe what the text says and can be helpful if the student cannot read it. Briggs, Reis, and Sullivan (2008) found three interventions or practices to support the academic achievement of CLED students at high levels in gifted programs. This included implementation of identification strategies designed to include more CLED students, use of curriculum/instructional strategies, and the creation of professional development opportunities.

Modifications can also be used to help educators identify gifted and talented students. Resources to aid educators working with GT/ELL students are available to help. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) *Pre-K-Grade 12 Programming Standards* (NAGC, 2010) include a culturally responsive curriculum as one of the ways educators can respond to the increasing multicultural nature of schools and gifted programs.

“When it comes to the specific learning area or general ed, we have a lot of different tools to use for our English speaking students, for our ELL students, that's what they are still trying to find more ways to identify them, usually nonverbal tests.” (P3)

More options should be available for identifying ELL students. According to Harris, Rapp, Martinez, and Plucker (2007), the traditional reliance on English-only standardized tests discriminates against ELL students, yet surprisingly little information is available on whether using versions of standard instruments in languages other than English leads to higher identification rates.

There can be misunderstandings about modifications such as differentiating that can be resolved with proper professional development. The district gifted and talented coordinator states that these misunderstandings are an issue.

P8 stated, “That again comes from professional development for the teachers on you don't give a kid 70 math problems because they are gifted extra work. Everyone else does 20, the gifted child does 70, no, the gifted kid should do maybe 5 to show you they got it, and they need to move on. But it is changing that mentality, across the board no matter what nationality.”

Researchers also agree that when working with or assessing ELL students in a gifted realm, differentiation can level the playing field. Peters and Engerrand (2016) asserted that with any differentiated identification system-one in which the identification procedures have been in any way modified to further the goal of equity-comes a need for differentiated services (p. 168).

Conclusion

With the student population becoming more diverse in our country, the purpose of this study was to gauge perception and learn methods to assist educators in identifying GT/ELL students. The benefits are an increased awareness and understanding of being able to identify and serve students as well as to share ideas and solutions for maximizing the school experience of GT/ELL students. The TELL Survey identified a need for more professional development in the areas of ELL and gifted separately, the question was not asked for both together, but as the ELL population grows in our country, this should become an opportunity for educators.

Limitations

The use of a few participants was a limitation of this study. A comparison of multiple school districts to provide more insights from educators could be useful in future research. Another limitation was that there was no way to verify the information discussed in the interviews since the researcher depended on their answers during the semi-structured interviews.

Implications

The findings of this study raise many questions that can be investigated by other researchers regarding educators' perception of GT/ELL students. Future research could involve a more substantial number of participants in multiple school districts. A comparison of rural, suburban, and urban schools would also be helpful in determining how educators perceive gifted/English language learners.

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Appendix A

Interview Request

Dear (Educator),

My name is Michelle Lynch and I am working on my thesis project for the Specialist in Gifted and Talented Education degree with Dr. Julia Roberts, Dr. Toni Szymanski, and Dr. Janet Tassell from Western Kentucky University. The study will focus on educators' perceptions of gifted students who are also English language learners and will be profiling two elementary schools in your district. Those two schools are School One and School Two. I plan to interview educators for the project. I have obtained approval from the Board of Education to conduct the study.

I will use interviews for the study and would definitely like interview you to gain your insight as you were recommended to me by your (building curriculum coordinator). Would you be available to meet me this summer for approximately one hour? I am willing to meet you at your school at a time and date that is convenient for you.

Please let me know if this is possible and your preferred dates and times. I truly appreciate your valuable insight and your time.

Thank you so much,
Michelle

Michelle Lynch
GATE/CELTIC Academy Teacher
Glasgow Independent Schools

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Teacher Questions

Professional Development

1. What grade levels do you work with? How many years have you been an educator and in what capacities? What information can you give me about the roles you have held during your career?
2. What professional development have you had on gifted education in the last three years? If yes, what kinds of opportunities were offered and who offered the opportunities?
3. What professional development have you had on educating English Language Learning students in the last three years? If yes, what kinds of opportunities were offered and who offered the opportunities?

Identification

1. How are referrals done? How frequently are referrals done? What else can you tell me about the identification process?
2. Who refers a child for Primary Talent Program or Gifted and Talented services?
3. Have you nominated ELL students for the Primary Talent Program and/or Gifted and Talented Program in the last few years? What do you look for when you make nominations?
4. What were the indicators of giftedness in the ELL children who have been nominated to be considered for the Primary Talent Pool or identified for Gifted Services?
5. How might behaviors of G/T, ELL students appear different than other gifted children?

Obstacles/Suggestions

1. What obstacles do you see that get in the way for ELL students to be identified for the Primary Talent Program or the Gifted and Talented Program? If obstacles are identified, please give me details on those obstacles?
2. Once they are identified, what obstacles make it difficult for GT/ELL students to participate in GT services?
3. What suggestions do you have for increasing opportunities for ELL students to be seen as gifted in your school?

School Curriculum Coordinator Questions

Professional Development

1. What grade levels do you work with? How many years have you been an educator and in what capacities? What information can you give me about the roles you have held during your career?
2. What professional development have you had on gifted education in the last three years? If yes, what kinds of opportunities were offered and who offered the opportunities?
3. What professional development have you had on educating English Language Learning students in the last three years? If yes, what kinds of opportunities were offered and who offered the opportunities?
4. What type of professional development have you offered for the teachers in your school on G/T students? ELL students?
5. How many students total are attending this school? How many teachers work at this school?
6. How many different languages are spoken at this school? What are the number of ELL students at this school? How many G/T students are attending this school? How many students are identified both ELL and GT at this school?

Identification

1. How are referrals done? How frequently are referrals done? What else can you tell me about the identification process?
2. Who refers a child for Primary Talent Program or Gifted and Talented services?
3. Have you nominated ELL students for the Primary Talent Program and/or Gifted and Talented Program in the last few years? What do you look for when you make nominations?
4. What were the indicators of giftedness in the ELL children who have been nominated to be considered for the Primary Talent Pool or identified for Gifted Services?
5. How might behaviors of G/T, ELL students appear different from other gifted children?

Obstacles/Suggestions

1. What obstacles do you see that get in the way for ELL students to be identified for the Primary Talent Program or the Gifted and Talented Program?
2. What obstacles make it difficult for GT/ELL students in GT services once they are identified? If obstacles are identified, please give me details on those obstacles?

3. What suggestions do you have for increasing opportunities for ELL students to be seen as gifted in your school?

District Level Coordinator Questions

Professional Development

1. How many years have you been an educator and in what capacities? What information can you give me about the roles you have held during your career?
2. What professional development have you had on gifted education in the last three years? If yes, what kinds of opportunities were offered and who offered the opportunities?
3. What professional development have you offered on educating English Language Learning students in the last three years? If yes, what kinds of opportunities were offered?
4. What professional development have you offered on educating Gifted and Talented students in the last three years? If yes, what kinds of opportunities were offered?
5. How many students total are in your district? How many teachers work in the district?
6. How many ELL teachers total are in the district? How many GT teachers are in district?
7. How many different languages are spoken in Warren County Schools? What is the total number of ELL students in district? How many G/T students total are in the district? How many students are identified both ELL and GT in the district?

Identification

1. How are referrals done? How frequently are referrals done? What else do you know about the identification process?
2. Who refers a child for Primary Talent Program or Gifted and Talented services?
3. Have you nominated ELL students for the Primary Talent Program and/or Gifted and Talented Program in the last few years? What do you look for when you make nominations?
4. What were the indicators of giftedness in the ELL children who have been nominated to be considered for the Primary Talent Pool or identified for Gifted Services?

5. How might behaviors of G/T, ELL students appear different than other gifted children?

Obstacles/Suggestions

1. What obstacles do you see that get in the way for ELL students to be identified for the Primary Talent Program or the Gifted and Talented Program?
2. What obstacles make it difficult for GT/ELL students in GT services once they are identified? If obstacles are identified, please give me details on those obstacles?
3. What suggestions do you have for increasing opportunities for ELL students to be seen as gifted in your school?

Appendix C

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

Dear Warren County Board of Education,

My name is Michelle Lynch, and I am a graduate student in the Department of Gifted Studies at Western Kentucky University. I am writing to obtain permission to conduct a research study in the Warren County School District. The research I wish to conduct for my thesis involves teacher perceptions of Gifted, English-Language Learners. This project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Julia Roberts and Dr. Antonia Szymanski from Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

I am hereby seeking your consent to interview six to eight educators in the Warren County School district to complete the research project. All interviews will be confidential and publications or presentations related to this study will not include identifiable references to subjects' identities. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to participants as a result of their participation in this study.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on by phone (270) 670-6194 or e-mail: lynch.jmkr@gmail.com

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Lynch
Western Kentucky University

Appendix D
Board Approval for Study



Rob Clayton
Superintendent

June 13, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

At the May 18, 2017 Warren County Schools Board of Education meeting, Michelle Lynch was approved to conduct her research study on teacher perceptions of Gifted, English-Language Learners (ELL's). The study will focus on educators' perceptions of gifted students who are also ELL's and will be profiling two elementary schools in our district – Lost River Elementary and Warren Elementary. She also has permission from me as the Gifted and Talented Director to interview 10-12 educators for her thesis.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Lorie E. Richey
Supervisor of Elementary Instruction
Director of Gifted & Talented Education
Warren County Public Schools

Appendix E



INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: **Educator Perceptions of Gifted and Talented English Language Learners**

Investigator: **Michelle C. Lynch, Department of Gifted and Talented Education,
michelle.lynych328@topper.wku.edu**

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project: The project's purpose is to study educator perceptions on Gifted and Talented English Language Learners. Guiding research questions are: What are educators' perceptions of Gifted and Talented/English Language Learners?
What are the barriers for identification of Gifted and Talented/English Language Learners?
How can educators' support Gifted and Talented/English Language Learners?

2. Explanation of Procedures: Approximately ten to twelve individuals including district personnel in the English Learning Department, the Gifted and Talented Coordinator, curriculum coordinators, ELL, and regular classroom teachers who have experience in working directly with GT/ELL students at Warren Elementary and Lost River Elementary will be interviewed after school hours. Each interview will take approximately one hour. Each interview will be recorded with permission.

3. Discomfort and Risks: There are no known risks or discomforts.

4. Benefits: To gain more perspective and understanding of Gifted/ELL students as well as to be aware of current efforts for students who fit this criteria.

5. Confidentiality: Publications or presentations related to this study will not include identifiable references to subjects' identities.

WKU IRB# 17-478
Approval - 7/5/2017
End Date - 5/31/2018
Expedited
Original - 6/14/2017

6. Refusal/Withdrawal: Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Signature of Participant

Date

Witness

Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the research. *(Initial here)* _____

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
 THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
 THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator
 TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129



WKU IRB# 17-478
 Approval - 7/5/2017
 End Date - 5/31/2018
 Expedited
 Original - 6/14/2017