

Bilingual Gifted Children

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Developing Staff Development Programs for Gifted LEP Students

1. Issues of test bias cannot be resolved through staff development. Researchers and test developers must work to alleviate concerns in this area. Classroom teachers, however, can be better educated about tests and their proper use. The following points would be important to include in a staff development presentation:

- a) Tests or any other such instruments chosen to measure potential are not reliable or valid enough to provide foolproof information on who is destined to achieve excellence (Tannenbaum, 1983).
- b) Test scores do not irrefutably define and identify a population of gifted children. At best, scores on standardized tests identify children who may learn somewhat better and more efficiently than children who score below them (Eby & Smutney, 1990).
- c) Conventional intelligence tests fail to recognize many of the intellectual components of talent such as divergent thinking, openness to ideals, and tolerance of ambiguity and complexity, as well as nonintellectual factors, such as motivation and strength of self-concept (Dabney, 1988).

2. Staff development programs should include opportunities for teachers to understand the wealth of information they can provide about children that is not accessible through tests. Schack and Starko (1990) suggested that by focusing teachers' attention on the unique information they can provide, teachers begin to act more as talent scouts than as gatekeepers eliminating students from consideration. They suggest that teachers can provide information about unique behaviors and events that children exhibit in the classroom such as the following: a) learning quickly and easily, b) initiating own learning, c) multiple interests, d) curiosity, e) leadership, f) hobbies or projects, and g) creativity. These behaviors and events are not easily derived from tests, according to Schack and Starko.

3. Staff development programs should include a variety of strategies to help teachers develop a common frame of reference about the core attributes of giftedness as they are expressed in different cultural and environmental contexts. Vignettes are a very useful strategy to help teachers develop story-picture of children's gifts that match what happens in the classrooms. Story-pictures provide a useful way to focus teachers' attention on diverse expressions of gifted behaviors in children whose performances are impacted by cultural and linguistic differences and by low socioeconomic circumstances and away from dysfunctional attitudes they may have about these children's abilities. Vignettes can also be used as a guide to stimulate teachers' development of their own story-pictures based on actual children in their classroom.

4. Staff development should include information about the family processes operative within the homes of children from economically disadvantaged and limited English proficient backgrounds who are achieving, regardless of their circumstances or status. While it is clear that disadvantaged families do not always appear to have the resources available to support their children's educational development, it is not correct to assume that they do not engage in supportive activities or that they do not use effective strategies in the encouragement of the intellectual development of their children. A growing number of studies and other reports provide rich information about the families of achieving children from economically disadvantaged and limited English proficient backgrounds (Billingsely, 1992, etc.)

5. Staff development programs should include opportunities for teachers to learn how to reinterpret checklist items for the parents of the children from economically disadvantaged and limited English proficient backgrounds in the communities they serve. This training would focus teachers' attention on finding ways to describe the attributes of gifted children in a manner that facilitates parents in their ability to provide good observational data about their children's gifts. As teachers gain skills in interpreting gifted behaviors as they appear in diverse groups, they are more prepared to focus on the real proficiencies, and less on any perceived deficiencies of children from economically disadvantaged and limited English proficient backgrounds. Teachers may also become more aware that differences are not necessarily deficits; they are simply differences.

6. Most importantly, staff development programs should be designed to provide teachers with opportunities to understand their role in identification as extending far beyond the

task of generating names of students for testing. They should have experiences that assist them in understanding that assessment refers to an entire process of observing students, making referrals for further evaluations, gather information from multiple tests and nontest sources, making professional decisions for services, planning and implementing appropriate programs and curricula using the information collected as the foundation, and evaluating student growth and development.

Strategies for Identifying the Talents of Diverse Students

Article written by Wendy Schwartz

The number of programs for gifted students is increasing nationwide, largely the result of Federal grants from the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Act of 1988. Students of color and those who are poor and limited in their English proficiency continue to be severely underrepresented in these programs, however. The reason is not that they are less talented than their middle-class white classmates; rather, their different experiences, values, and beliefs have prevented them from fully demonstrating their abilities through commonly used assessment instruments, and in traditional gifted education programs

To assess the abilities of all students more accurately, educators are now using criteria for giftedness that give equal attention to academic and non-academic abilities. Identification strategies, consisting of both traditional and non-traditional methods, often include a review of student behaviors as well as standardized test scores (Frasier, 1992). To better develop the talents of all students, teachers are being prepared to recognize diversity in giftedness. To ensure that children receive early enrichment in school if their family cannot provide it, many educators are also beginning the gifted identification process at the preschool level. Finally, to redress the past inequities in student selection for gifted programs, school districts are beginning to reach out to diverse communities to increase the access of all students to such programs.

Thus, the goal of education for the gifted has become inclusivity, not exclusivity (Frasier, 1992), although the debate over the value of gifted programs, particularly as they are thought to perpetuate student tracking practices, continues.

Defining Intelligence and Talent

Traditionally, a student's intelligence was considered in very narrow terms, defined by only those abilities measured by IQ test. Now, educators are more likely to use the term "talent" instead of "intelligence," and to describe it as an indication of future achievement and a potential to be nurtured and developed, not a demonstrated, immutable ability. Emphasis is shifting from what a child knows to how a child learns (Hiatt, 1991). There is a recognition that a great diversity exists among the gifted and their expression of talent, and, particularly, that different cultures express themselves differently. The result is that evidence of giftedness may be overlooked by evaluators unfamiliar with a child's native culture (Frasier, 1992).

Using Gardner's (1983) concept of multiple intelligences, many indicators of talent can be found in all children, regardless of ethnicity or poverty status. In fact, gifted people may manifest their abilities through just a single talent, such as music or mathematics. Also, evidence of giftedness, particularly in children of diverse cultures, is often non-traditional. Indicators of superior intelligence include the following indicators of superior intelligence include the following:

- a. The ability to manipulate a symbol system.
- b. The ability to think logically.
- c. The ability to use stored knowledge to solve problems.
- d. The ability to reason by analogy.
- e. The ability to extrapolate knowledge to different circumstances.
- f. Creativity and artistic ability.
- g. Resiliency: the ability to cope with school while living in poverty with dysfunctional families.
- h. The ability to take on adult roles at home, such as managing the household and supervising siblings, even at the expense of school attendance and achievement.
- i. A strong sense of self, pride, and worth.
- j. Leadership ability and an independent mind.
- k. Understanding of one's cultural heritage.

Identification methods

To reduce the possibility that children who do not fit stereotypical profiles of gifted children will be passed over, identifying students from diverse backgrounds for talent needs to be a multi-pronged effort by many of the adults close to them. Involving adults from children's home, religious, and community lives in the identification process helps ensure that the availability of gifted programs is widely known. Outreach is especially important in areas where parents may be totally absorbed by meeting their family's basic and immediate needs, and unable to focus on the possibility that their children may be gifted or to provide educational enrichment.

To facilitate identification at school, teacher training programs are now providing an education about cultural and talent diversity among gifted students, particularly to help educators understand how learning styles differences can mask evidence of special talents (Balizer, 1990).

Neither poor academic achievement nor limited English language ability indicates a lack of giftedness (Shaklee & Hansford, 1992), for a variety of factors can prevent children from fully demonstrating their intellect. For example, a lack of access to stimulating educational materials and experiences can impede children's early intellectual development, nutritional deficiencies can compromise their ability to concentrate, social isolation can delay their development of interpersonal skills, and trauma from a disadvantaged and dysfunctional home life can express their overall functioning (Balzer & Siewert, 1990).

The children themselves, and the adults in their lives, may not even be aware of their talents. At an early age, possibly as a result of discrimination faced by their family or an internalization of negative attitudes of educators, even very intelligent students may develop low self-esteem and an expectation of failure that compromise their efforts to succeed (Passow, 1991).

Also, children may not have the opportunity to explore their abilities in the early grades. Many schools do not provide a psychological safe environment designed for experimentation and self-expression that would allow students to make up for time lost in a home environment that did not cultivate their talents (Shaklee, 1992). Thus, even by third grade, when it is traditional to assess students for gifted programs, some already will have adapted to an unchallenging education system, stifling their creativity and curiosity. Schools can use the following methods of identifying giftedness in concert to ensure that all students receive fair consideration.

Standardized Tests

New standardized tests have been developed to replace traditional instruments determined to be culturally biased. They include Mercer's System of Multicultural Plurastic Assessment (SOMPA), Renzulli and Hartman's Scale for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students, the PADI diagnostic battery, and Burch's Abbreviated Binet for the Disadvantaged (ABDA).

Observation

Recommendations from educators, parents, and classmates can draw attention to children's talents, such as sensitivity to and insight into their environment, and an ability to manipulate the symbol systems valued by a subculture. Soliciting such information can begin at the preschool level and continue throughout schooling. Parents can notice their children's level of absorption in intellectual tasks and unusually varied interests and curiosity. In fact, asking parents to consider their children's talents is a good way to encourage their involvement in enrichment activities.

Teacher observation permits the evaluation of development over time. Teachers can consider the way students problem solve, as well as their answers. They can see how students use their time, and how many of the talent indicators cited above apply to them. Also, simply asking students who is the smartest or most helpful among them can prompt teachers' identification of an otherwise unnoticed child.

Self-identification

Through biographical inventories, students can indicate talents they use in non-school settings, such as membership in a drama club. They can describe their participation in family activities, and even indicate if they assume a management role at home.

Portfolios

Progress over time, along with overall achievement, can be assessed by reviewing the materials that students select for their portfolios. This allows for evaluation in areas such as exceptional learning, use, and generation of knowledge. Also, unlike standardized

tests, portfolios permit assessment of students' creativity. To help standardized portfolio evaluation, schools can develop a list of criteria to consider, such as the complexity of the presentation.

Conclusion

Identifying the special talents of students from diverse backgrounds is just the first step toward helping them achieve their full potential. Educators need to develop programs for gifted students that reflect and respect their cultures and learning styles. Doing so will demonstrate to the students that they truly belong in such programs, and will help ensure their retention and success. Teachers, along with community members (including local colleges) and the students' families, need to work together to empower and encourage all students, and to provide them with enriching educational materials and experiences and role models and mentors.