What Policies and Practices Can Help Identify and Nurture Giftedness Among English Learners?

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"EL students who exit EL earlier have a greater probability of being identified as gifted, but they do not have higher slopes of achievement growth than other gifted students. Odds of being identified as gifted decreases by 30% for each year they are not reclassified"

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Key Characteristics of Gifted English Learners

- Rapid language acquisition
- High ability to code-switch
- Exceptional memory
- Quick mastery of grammar
- High translation accuracy (oral)
- Creative problem solving
- Advanced language skills
- Navigates appropriate behaviors successfully within both cultures
- Demonstrates exceptional talent in areas valued in their culture

8 WAYS to Nurture Giftedness Among English Learners

Differentiate Instruction with Depth and Complexity

- Go beyond superficial level topics and allow students to dive into complex ideas, relationships, and theories within subjects they're passionate about. Introduce intricate concepts and encourage connections between topics, especially when they can relate these to their cultural backgrounds.

Encourage Creativity and Critical Thinking

- Gifted ELs often excel in creative tasks and innovative thinking. Offer them activities that promote creativity, like storytelling, debates, and inquiry-based learning where they can explore real-world issues and generate solutions. This promotes critical thinking while also giving ELs a chance to use and develop language in a meaningful context.

Integrate Technology for Language and Content Mastery

- Utilize language-learning apps and advanced resources. Tools like digital graphic organizers, translation apps, and voice-to-text can be helpful for gifted ELs who may have advanced ideas but need language support.

Support Academic Language Development

- Explicitly teach academic vocabulary and language structures that are essential for advanced content comprehension. Graphic organizers and visuals can help.

Utilize Cluster Grouping Strategies

- Grouping gifted ELs with other high-ability peers fosters collaboration. Mixed-ability groups allow ELs to practice language skills and social interactions, especially if they're able to take on roles where they can lead discussions.

Provide a Safe Environment for Risk-Taking and Sense of Belonging

- Create a classroom environment where gifted ELs feel safe to take risks, make mistakes, and practice the English language without fear of judgement. This fosters language development, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

Utilize Culturally Responsive Teaching

- Connect content to students' cultural experiences, allowing them to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Allow ELs to incorporate their heritage language into projects or discussions, which can deepen understanding and provide a bridge to complex concepts in English.

Offer Acceleration and Independent Study Opportunities

- Gifted ELs may benefit from grade-level acceleration, curriculum compacting, or dual-enrollment courses that match their abilities. Provide independent study options on topics of strong interest. Research projects allow them to explore topics deeply while also practice English in a meaningful way.

20 Tips for Identifying Gifted EL Students

Adopt Universal Screening Procedures

1. Adopt a policy of universal screening for all students in one or more grade levels for the identification process.

2. Select assessment instruments that are culturally sensitive and account for language differences.

3. Assess the speed of English language acquisition and monitor the rate of mastering reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in English.

4. Consider including reliable and valid nonverbal ability assessments as part of the overall identification process.

5. Establish identification criteria that require students to meet one or more, but not necessarily all criteria.

6. Use other identification tools to supplement results of universal screening.

Create Alternative Pathways to Identification

7. Use native language ability and achievement assessments as indicators of potential giftedness, when available.

8. Maintain a list of multilingual school psychologists who are qualified to administer assessments in the student's native language.

9. Establish a preparation program prior to formal identification procedures that provides students with learning opportunities to enhance knowledge and academic skills necessary for a student to be recognized.

10. Create a talent pool list of students who exhibit high potential but are not yet enrolled in gifted and talented programs. Observations, daily interactions between teachers and students, informal assessments, and formal assessments provide multiple opportunities to gauge students' learning progress. Make identification of giftedness an ongoing process rather than a single event.

11. Offer enrichment programs that take into account the student's linguistic needs

Establish a Web of Communication

12. Establish an identification committee that includes representatives who have key responsibilities in various roles and departments.

13. Develop and implement intentional outreach to the school community, particularly parents/guardians/caretakers. This process should utilize multiple pathways in languages appropriate to the population.

14. Emphasize collaboration within and across specializations/departments (e.g., general education, English as a second language [ESL], special education, gifted education) so people view themselves as talent scouts.

View Professional Development as a Lever for Change

15. Provide professional development opportunities for school personnel about effective policies and practices to support equitable representation of ELs in gifted and talented programs.

16. Develop a systematic approach to analyzing district and school demographics and the status of students identified/not identified for gifted and talented programs.

17. Promote efforts to diversify the teaching corps so that the adult community of a school reflects the student population.

18. Be talent scouts, searching for points of promise, rather than deficit detectives looking for reasons to not include students.

Include Parents' and Students' Voices

19. Parents know their children best. Invite parents to be part of the conversation about their child's strengths, gifts, and talents.
20. Conduct student interviews and include opportunities for self-nomination.