

# Suggestions for Identifying and Supporting English Learners with High Abilities, Gifts, and Talents

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## The Indiana High Ability – English Learner Collaborative

### Essential Questions

- **What are the implications of identifying, or NOT identifying, EL students who have high abilities, gifts and talents (for them, for our schools, for society ...)?**
- **How can we identify ELs who have the potential to perform at advanced levels of achievement when they are not yet proficient in English?**
- **Once we have identified ELs as having high abilities, how do we maximize that potential?**

### Introduction

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students (specifically African American and Hispanic) are fifty percent less likely than White students to be identified for gifted/high ability programs (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007). Most teachers who are licensed to teach gifted (high ability) students are not trained to work with CLD students and are mono-lingual themselves (Irby & Lara-Alecia, 1996). On the other hand, teachers who are licensed to teach CLD and English Learning (EL) students need to be trained to identify giftedness, and need training in gifted educational approaches and best practices.

Furthermore, for English learners, testing for achievement or even aptitude is usually a test of English language proficiency. Testing of students who are culturally/linguistically different or economically disadvantaged has been shown to produce results that typically fall below requirements for gifted programs (Matthews, 2006). Culture free and culture fair testing is difficult if not impossible. Even non-verbal testing has not proven to be culture free and fair as many visual representations are based in culture (i.e. a mailbox...students from other parts of the world may not be familiar with a typical American mailbox while American children would recognize it easily). Furthermore, non-verbal tests do not necessarily represent academic work that the student would need to engage in and may not be a good predictor if used as a sole determining data point (Lohman, Korb, & Lakin, 2007).

Studies have shown that bilingualism and biliteracy increase the cognitive abilities of students (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Academic language skills developed in the first language can facilitate the development of the second language, especially at advanced literacy levels (Cummins, 2000).

There is a need for culturally responsive instruction. Inequities in school practices, along with stereotypes, can erode students' strengths, lessen their motivation, and compromise their educational outcomes. In many instances, administrators, teachers, and other school staff who do not adequately take cultural diversity into account may find that students:

- Feel unaccepted and, as a result, demonstrate acting-out behaviors
- Are not sure how to succeed in school
- Believe that their skin color or ethnic characteristics (e.g., manner of dress) make them somehow inferior or too different from the school culture
- Feel embarrassed because they speak English with accents and so experience stress or anxiety during class (<http://www.iriscenter.com>)

### **Process for Alternative Identification for English Learners:**

Step 1: Analyze district data to determine representation of diverse populations in High Ability/Gifted Programming.

Step 2: Review identification procedure and current district policy/practices of High Ability program inclusion.

Step 3: Take into account characteristics of CLD or ELs with Gifts and High Abilities  
Use check lists and observation tools (Appendix A)

Step 4: Add alternative methods of identification to your plan.

A. Team approach

1. Establish an identification committee
2. English learner specialist as part of the team

B. Compare student to like peers

1. Similar English Learners (age, time in country, initial ELP level, background)
2. Include former ELs who exited for up to 4 years (as per ESSA)
3. Establish local norms for data

C. Dynamic Assessment – an experimental and developing method involving a pre-test, instruction, post-test (which would not test prior knowledge or culturally biased information, but newly learned material) (Castellano, J.,1998)

D. Broaden data points and use a menu of identification procedures

1. Look at WIDA Access or other English Language Proficiency tests for rapid growth – look at students with greatest growth in a grade level compared to like peers according to district's stanine requirements for HA placement (i.e.

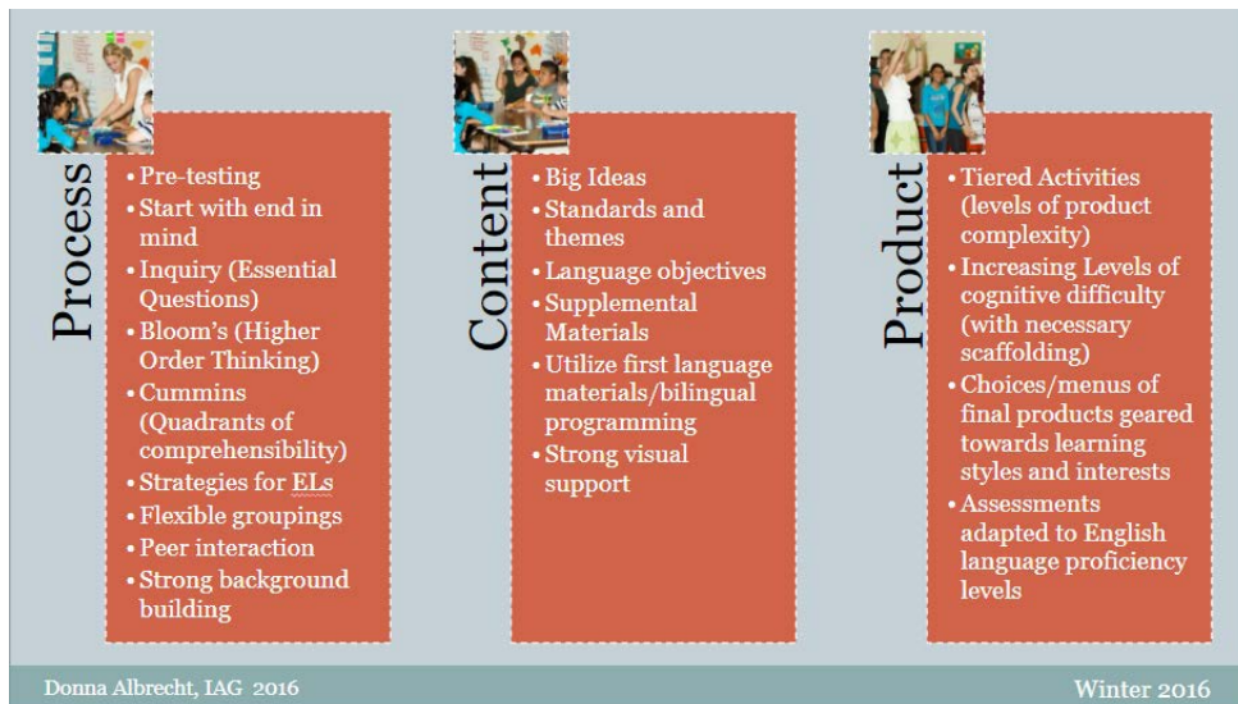
- 9<sup>th</sup> stanine or 90<sup>th</sup> percentile).
2. Consider native language ability and achievement when applicable (not all ELs have had the opportunity to maintain their first language at an academic level).
  3. Use non-verbal tools in mainstream tests such as CogAT, Naglieri nonverbal.
  4. When using traditional data points, sort and compare data by like-peer groups (subgroups) such as English Learners, Hispanic, Black, low socio-economic status. Look for the students in these groups who are at the stanine or percentile determined by your district compared to their like peers, not to native English speaking peers (i.e. top 95% of all ELs, or 9<sup>th</sup> stanine of all ELs)
  5. Utilize behavior checklists or rating scales by teachers and parents, but use caution and ensure accurate professional translation if used in the home language with parents, and ensure teachers are trained to recognize these characteristics in diverse populations. Add characteristics of CLD/EL high ability students (such as HOPE from Purdue <http://purduegeri.wixsite.com/instrument/hope> or the checklist in Appendix A). Make sure to use like peer comparisons.
  6. Utilize portfolios to show growth over time and more accurate representation of student ability.
  7. Learn about language background of student and take into consideration different narrative structures, such as circular or inductive patterns, poetic and rhythmic, etc. (Trumbull & Farr, 2005).
  8. Consider culture specific gifts and talents - i.e. leadership, creativity.

### **Create pilot programs**

- A. Establish a watch program for high growth trajectory ELs (rapid language growth, high growth compared to like peers on standardized or adaptive tests, etc.).
- B. Place high trajectory growth students in clusters in High Ability classrooms as purposeful grouping/placement.
- C. Ensure EL support in High Ability placements by assigning EL co-teacher/coach to work with HA teacher as a team or place EL specialist on High Ability team across grade levels
- D. Use community liaisons, mentors, sponsors, advocates in the recruitment of high ability and gifted ELs.
- E. Develop a support system to help gifted ELs adjust to a new environment.
- F. Develop a gifted education program guide and sessions for parents to keep them informed of program goals and expectations – have translators present.
- G. Informational materials about the HA/Gifted program should be available in the language of the families.

- H. CLD/EL students must see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Use culturally responsive pedagogy and materials. Develop a global mindset in the classroom.
- I. Train teachers to work with gifted students from CLD backgrounds.
- J. School counseling should be designed to meet the affective, social-emotional, and psychological needs of CLD gifted students.
- K. Utilize bilingual programming and/or encourage use of first language by students and families.
- L. Involve students in community service projects that are important to them and reflect the diverse nature of the group.

## Supporting English Learners in the Classroom with Differentiation



# Strategies for Working with English Learners: The Basics

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1. Provide comprehensible input for ELs. Language is not “soaked up.” The learner must understand the message that is conveyed. (Krashen)
2. Make lessons visual and hands-on (manipulatives, realia).
3. Link new information to prior knowledge (Schema Theory).
4. Determine key concepts for the unit and define content and language objects (or use WIDA Model Performance Indicators) for each lesson, and share these with the students (SIOP, WIDA).
5. Modify vocabulary instruction for ELs. Word walls (interactive, multi-lingual, visual, actively use), concept maps, word work should be used at all grade levels. Intentionally teach both academic content words and function words (What Works Clearing House).
6. Use cooperative learning strategies. Lecture style teaching and individual worksheet completion excludes ELs from the learning in a classroom. Do not relegate ELs to the fringes of the classroom doing a separate lesson with a classroom aide or ESL teacher. They need to be included.
7. Vary class work formats and explain the purpose of each type.
8. Model and discuss commonly practiced classroom behaviors, such as asking and answering questions, offering an opinion or point of view, and taking turns.
9. Allow extended wait time for students (we all need time to think and formulate answers).
10. Learn about the cultures represented in your classroom by talking to adults familiar with them or through internet research, etc. Ask the students questions. Don’t be afraid to engage.
11. Talk about American culture and behaviors to raise awareness for all students in your class.
12. Provide opportunities for students from other cultures to share about their cultures and background knowledge.
13. Work between languages, allow first language to play a role at any point, learn from the L1.
14. Differentiate testing and homework for ELs. Content area homework and assessments need to be adapted for ELs at their language proficiency levels. Use WIDA Standards and materials to guide adaptation of materials to the language level of your students.



## Appendix A

### Characteristics of English Learners with High Abilities, Gifts and Talents

Academic Traits:	1 – 5 scale, 1=less than like peers, 5= substantially more than like peers; notes	
• Rapid acquisition of the second language (English) beyond norm of peer group		
• Quick grasp of newly introduced information		
• Intense interest and curiosity		
• Ability to see connections		
• High mathematical ability		
• Ability to manipulate a symbol system		
• Ability to use stored knowledge to solve problems		
• Utilization of analogy to reason		
• Ability to transfer knowledge to new situations		
• Exceptional talents in areas valued by their culture		
• Keen power of observation		
• Originality and imagination		
• Demonstrates creative thinking/problem solving		
• Demonstrate creativity and artistic ability		
Personal Dispositions:	1 – 5 scale, 1=less than like peers, 5= substantially more than like peers; notes	
• Takes responsibility seriously (often home responsibilities)/strong family ties		
• Preference for collaboration – leads and works with others well		
• Readily share culture and have a strong interest in culture		
• Display cross-cultural flexibility/cultural sensitivity		
• Possess a keen or subtle sense of humor that crosses languages and cultures		
• Display unusual sensitivity to others and their world		
• Display a strong inner will		
• Display a strong sense of pride/self-efficacy		
• Idealism, sense of justice and advanced moral judgement		
• High expectations of self and others		

(Castellano, 2010; Manning, 2006)

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