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When Teachers Are the Gatekeepers of Gifted and Talented Programs: Potential Factors for English Learners' Underrepresentation and Possible Solutions

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Introduction

Across the nation, access, equity, and the absence of certain groups are an issue in gifted education. Many American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN), Black, and Latinx students remain underrepresented in gifted programs (Gentry et al., 2019) and disproportionality rates for culturally and linguistically diverse students mirror those for students of color (List & Dykeman, 2020). The United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) revealed that 2% of English language learners (ELLs) participate in gifted and talented (GT) programs as compared to 7% of non-ELLs. More recently, a survey done by *Education Week*, which included responses from almost 800 gifted and talented teachers and hundreds more school and district-level gifted and talented coordinators, highlights the disproportionality involved with ELLs' access to gifted education; of those surveyed, 63% considered ELLs to be underrepresented in their districts' gifted education (Mitchell, 2020).

The concerns related to the inclusion of ELLs in GT programs have been recognized for years (Aguirre, 2003; Bernal, 2002; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Torrance, 1969), but the continued low presence of ELLs in GT programs requires further attention (Mun et al., 2020). Several factors might contribute to the underrepresentation of ELLs in GT programs including the lack of centralized regulation of gifted programs and the use of standardized testing as an identification instrument (Castellano, 2011; Coronado, & Lewis, 2017; Ford et al., 2008).

However, many districts' low presence of identified gifted ELLs may be attributed to the large role that general education teachers play in who is recognized and nominated (Esquiedo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Moon & Brighton, 2008). Since it is typical for gifted screenings to be based on teacher and parent referrals, Card and Giuliano (2016) suggested that teacher and parent discretion is a barrier to identification when qualified students from disadvantaged

backgrounds are under-referred. As it is often a standard process for the screening of gifted students to begin with a referral from a teacher, it is inevitable that teachers may overlook qualified students for a variety of reasons, including implicit biases, unfamiliarity with the knowledge and skills needed to work with English learners, and inexperience with what “gifted” looks like in diverse students.

Teachers’ Influence on GT Identification

Biases

Because gifted education is so loosely governed at the federal level, formal training for teachers working with gifted students is often not required. When teachers lack training, they are more likely to be ineffective at successfully identifying and working with gifted students (Trotman Scott & Ford, 2011). Unprepared teachers may also not be able to recognize the role their personal biases play when nominating or screening prospective gifted students. Many teachers hold deficit-oriented views toward culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students which presents a key obstruction to the identification of such students in gifted education (Ford et al., 2008). Harry (2008) noted that deficit orientations affect more than thoughts, attitudes, and values; deficit thinking reveals itself in teachers’ actions. Ford et al. (2008) also noted a correlation between thoughts and actions. They believe that behaviors stemming from teacher beliefs include “a heavy reliance on tests with little consideration of biases, low referral rates of CLD students for gifted education services, and the adoption of policies and procedures that have a disparate impact on CLD students” (Ford et al., 2008, p. 293).

This is seen in Allen's (2017) study, which found that instructors' views result in an overemphasis on testing. According to Allen, a classroom teacher who was questioned indicated that they didn't know if an ELL who had some gifted qualities would have scored well, thus they

didn't recommend them for gifted screening. Another classroom teacher had similar concerns in Allen's (2017) study, indicating that they saw a lot of potential in a student but believed that testing would hold them back. Remarks such as these demonstrate that relying too much on test results can be harmful since test scores might cause teachers to perceive students' abilities to be lower than they actually are (Allen, 2017). How teachers view the capabilities and potential of ELLs in their classrooms and their resulting actions can be seriously impacted by the implicit biases teachers have regarding intelligence, giftedness, and language potential (Gubbins et al., 2018). Additionally, teachers' misconceptions about identifying gifted ELs may contribute to the culture of deficit thinking among educators concerning ELs (Costello, 2017).

Lack of Expertise for Working with ELLs

Lack of preparedness for working with ELLs can also be a factor that affects the likelihood that a teacher will nominate an ELL, especially since many general education teachers may not have specific language and cultural knowledge (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Traditionally, until they developed sufficient proficiency to function in the general education classroom, ELLs had been typically served in English language development (ELD) programs with teachers who have had specialized training (Villegas et al., 2018). Thus, many general education teachers who work with ELLs often have minimal experience with the various concepts associated with educating ELLs. Consequently, they lack the expertise that is associated with linguistically responsive practices.

One focus of the expertise required to teach ELLs involves the need for teachers to understand the process of second language learning (Lucas, 2011). Specifically, the distinction between social and academic language is a crucial concept that teachers need to understand (Villegas et al., 2018). If a teacher observes an ELL speaking fluently with their peers, they may

fall victim to the common misconception that the ELL is proficient in English. Misconceptions could affect ELLs' access to GT programs because if a teacher holds a false impression regarding a student's proficiency, they may assume that the student has lower cognitive abilities and may not pursue a referral.

Pereira and de Oliveira (2015) identified another type of knowledge that can be helpful for teachers who work with ELLs; proficiency levels are a valuable source of information, providing details on students' abilities and skills and assisting teachers in developing appropriate expectations for language learners. Additionally, looking at language proficiency levels from past assessments can show how quickly ELLs have developed language; understanding language levels is important because rapid language development may be a sign of giftedness (Slocumb & Olenchak, 2006). Insight into the differences between social and academic language and the importance of proficiency levels may not only help with identifying gifted ELLs but is essential in facilitating the overall academic development of multilingual learners; however, this knowledge is often not part of a general education teacher's repertoire.

Beliefs About Giftedness

Another factor affecting ELLs' referral to GT programs is that teachers may not understand what giftedness looks like in other cultures. Even as early as the 1960s it was noted that extraordinary potentialities may be overlooked if educators "insist on identifying and cultivating only those kinds of talent that the dominant, advantaged culture values" (Torrance, 1969, p. 72). Teachers are less inclined to consider students as gifted when they are not aware of the distinct characteristics of gifted bilingual students (Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012). According to Gubbins et al. (2018), the following terms signify behaviors considered in Anglo-American culture to be signs of giftedness: assertiveness, activity initiation, inquiry, and class

contributions. Using these behavioral indicators as standards to determine whether a student is gifted is unfair, as such behaviors are not a representation of giftedness, but rather reflect learned social skills (Gubbins et al., 2018). An early report by Slocumb and Olenchak (2006) highlighted the disparities in how giftedness manifests in students from varied backgrounds; they examined numerous traits from the perspective of a typically regarded gifted/talented student vs. a gifted/talented English learner, and differences between indicators were recorded. Traditionally gifted/talented individuals are very verbal and employ sophisticated vocabulary, but an ELL may achieve new language proficiency fast but do so through a cycle of silence in order to avoid speech errors (Slocumb & Olenchak, 2006). Slocumb and Olenchak also pointed out that typically gifted and talented children can comprehend complicated concepts and thoughts, and that ELLs may express complex ideas through art.

Likewise, assuming leadership roles is often common in traditionally gifted/talented students but being a leader may not be as obviously exhibited in ELLs as their leadership roles may align more to family needs or within their community rather than in school settings (Slocumb & Olenchak, 2006). Slocumb and Olenchak (2006) cautioned educators that when selecting instruments and processes for identifying GT students, the assorted attributes should be considered. Peters et al. (2019) echoed the concern to examine various qualities as they insisted that if teachers hold deficit-oriented views towards ELLs or believe that culturally inappropriate markers are the only signs of giftedness, then many ELLs may not make it through the screening process if teacher nomination is required. This is a valid worry, as Costello's (2017) study highlighted that traditional perceptions of giftedness and how gifted qualities manifest in the classroom discouraged most teachers from nominating ELs for gifted programs.

Ensuring Equitable Identification

Central to the issue of the underrepresentation of ELLs in gifted programs in several states and districts is the heavy reliance on the input of teachers who may not be properly trained to accurately identify giftedness. How can districts and schools address the inequities that may have arisen as a result? Melesky (as cited in Mun et al., 2016) asserted that the recognition of the presence of giftedness in all groups of children irrespective of ethnicity, race, culture, and socioeconomic strata is where we should begin in order to have an effective gifted identification model for ELLs. Districts should first use data to inform them if disproportionalities exist within their systems. If data reveal that ELLs are not proportionally represented in the gifted and talented program, then districts need to act. Action might begin with districts evaluating their procedures. If GT identification starts with teacher referral, then revision of the identification process for gifted programs demands a focus on teachers.

Training as a Solution

Most educators recognize that not all gifted students are the same, but there are certain misunderstandings about giftedness and gifted learners that must be addressed, and this includes building awareness of the diversity of high-ability learners (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014). Costello's (2017) study discovered that giftedness in ELLs can manifest in and out of the classroom in a variety of non-traditional ways that educators who teach ELLs may not recognize. Moreover, Allen (2017) found that general education teachers did not even consider giftedness when students in their classrooms were enrolled in ELL programs. Such data show that awareness training is required.

Awareness-building training is in keeping with the ideals of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) as they note in a recent position statement that to reverse the

underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education, educators must first understand why CLD students have traditionally been excluded from participation in gifted programs (NAGC, 2021). This article has highlighted a few variables that teachers may be unaware of when it comes to the exclusion of ELLs from gifted talented programs. Hence, the plea for awareness training is valid and necessary and the impact of such training on identifying gifted ELLs could be favorable.

As a result of their study which investigated the role teacher perceptions play in the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted programming, Allen (2017) claimed that if teachers participated in professional development opportunities that increased their awareness of the importance of recognizing potential giftedness in ELLs, they may be better able to see past the language barrier and notice gifts and talents among these diverse learners, making them less likely to overlook them for gifted evaluation. Participants interviewed in Allen's study expressly stated that "it's all about awareness" and that professional development will assist teachers in being more conscious of their perceptions (p. 83).

Costello (2017) drew a similar conclusion, claiming that training helps reduce stereotyping and discrimination, which are key barriers for ELLs in having their giftedness recognized. Costello's and Allen's (2017) calls for training are also promoted by the NAGC as they state that to fulfill the needs of CLD children, educators' views on these students must change (NAGC, 2021). As Allen pointed out, if you're more informed about something, you know more about it and tend to perceive things differently. Thus, awareness building through professional development may be a possible solution to remedy the under-identification of gifted ELLs caused by factors outside of teachers' conscious awareness. Because the majority of their study participants admitted to knowing little about how to identify gifted ELLs and the legal

ramifications of denying ELLs access to gifted programs, Costello advocated for workshops that may raise awareness of traditional and nontraditional giftedness traits, and cultural competency.

Awareness training is not the only type of professional development that can be beneficial. Training in being ‘responsive’—a quality the NAGC includes as an integral part of its revised 2019 standards—would be valuable as well. The NAGC (2019) *Pre-K–Grade 12 Programming Standards* remind educators that “curriculum, instructional strategies, and materials and resources must engage a variety of gifted learners using practices that are responsive to diversity” and it is necessary for teachers to “understand the role of language and communication in talent development and the ways in which culture and identity affect communication and behavior” (p. 10). These aspects are addressed in detail in Standard 3.3 (Responsiveness to Diversity) and Standard 4.4 (Cultural Competence; NAGC, 2019). The revised standards are evidence of the significance of cultural responsiveness.

Much earlier, Ford (2010) highlighted the importance of being culturally responsive. “When teachers are culturally responsive, they are student-centered; they eliminate barriers to learning and achievement and, thereby, open doors for culturally different students to reach their potential” (Ford, 2010, p. 50). However, Lucas and Villegas (2011, 2013) contended that cultural responsiveness does not go far enough for ELLs as it keeps language related concerns in the periphery. They assert that you must focus on language because to appropriately support ELLs, general education teachers need to understand the connections between language and learning and the implications of those connections for ELLs (Lucas et al., 2008; Lucas & Villegas, 2010).

The concept of linguistically responsive teaching (LRT) was introduced by Lucas and Villegas (2011) to elaborate on the notion of culturally responsive education. Pereira and de Oliveira (2015) summarized LRT as having a respect for and positive attitudes toward linguistic

diversity, possessing the capacity to detect the language demands of school language, and having the ability to implement core concepts proven to aid in second-language acquisition, and they contend that teachers who utilize linguistically responsive teaching practices are better equipped to assist gifted ELLs in succeeding in school.

More specifically, being a linguistically responsive teacher involves two major components which are comprised of three orientations and four kinds of knowledge/skills (Lucas et al., 2008; Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Lucas and Villegas (2011) explained “orientations” as viewpoints, awareness, beliefs, or attitudes that teachers should have in order to work effectively with ELLs. They list the necessary teachers’ orientations as sociolinguistic consciousness—which includes understanding the connection between language, culture, and identity, as well as being aware of the sociopolitical dimension of language use and education—valuing linguistic diversity, and advocating for ELLs. The knowledge and skills part of the framework refers to disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners, and pedagogical skills (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Explaining the components of LRT in detail can show how training in this framework might help teachers identify gifted ELLs.

The first orientation of the linguistically responsive framework -*sociolinguistic consciousness* requires a teacher to understand that an individual’s language and identity are linked (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). When teachers understand that language is like culture and is part of who a person is (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), they may be more inclined to incorporate languages into the classroom. Lucas and Villegas (2011) asserted that taking students’ linguistic backgrounds into account can lead to actively promoting the use of students’ languages in instruction which will help them build confidence. If students feel confident, then they will be more likely to take risks with language and content. Taking risks in the classroom can have

benefits for students including facilitating academic development (American University, 2020). Additionally, teachers who possess sociolinguistic consciousness recognize that language can be tied to socio-political contexts and power and therefore can be used to create hierarchies and lead to language discrimination (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Awareness of issues of power and discrimination can help teachers understand how ELLs might be marginalized by inequitable policies and practices including the policies in their districts' GT programs.

The second orientation within the framework is the *value of linguistic diversity*. Teachers who are aware of the interconnectedness of language and identity and the sociopolitical aspects of language do not hold deficit views toward ELLs but see their students' language background as assets for the classroom (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Taking an asset-based approach to language is important because a lack of value in students' linguistic resources may translate into lower expectations (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The unchallenging instructional practices that result with low expectations occur when teachers have deficit mindsets.

Deficit views have been noted by several (Ford et al., 2008; Gubbins et al., 2018; Harry, 2008) as a barrier to teachers' referrals of GT ELLs. Additionally, when languages are regarded as beneficial, gains occur. Encouraging students to communicate in and use materials in their native language will facilitate learning (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Taylor et al. (2008) highlighted that when value is placed on students' capital which includes their language, such affirmation strengthens students feeling of belonging and engages them in literacy and learning. Engagement could lead to higher achievement and achievement scores are regularly used for identifying giftedness (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC] & The Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted [CSDGP], 2015).

The final orientation identified as crucial for general education teachers is the *inclination to advocate for ELLs*. Teachers need to have the willingness to act as advocates for ELLs (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Desire to act can emerge from the understandings of the sociopolitical dimensions of language-particularly the disregard for languages that are not English (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Therefore, teachers who advocate for ELLs speak or act on behalf of them if they see students' languages being devalued (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Furthermore, "equity for ELLs must be the explicit focus of advocacy efforts to ensure that language-related issues do not continue to be minimized or ignored" (Lucas & Villegas, 2010, p. 310). Equity regarding GT programs means that teachers could work toward incorporating more equitable assessments or denouncing policies that do not recognize the unique characteristics of giftedness in ELLs.

The remaining components of Lucas and Villegas' (2011) framework focus on knowledge and skills. The first essential type of knowledge involves understanding the importance of *learning about students' language backgrounds*. Teachers must learn that ELLs are not a homogeneous group. They have varied academic experiences as well as varying levels of proficiency. Teachers need to understand the importance and how to gain specific knowledge about their ELLs so to provide appropriate instruction (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). "Without this knowledge, teachers cannot anticipate the aspects of learning that are likely to be too difficult for their ELLs to handle without instructional supports" (Lucas et al., 2008, p. 366). Linguistically responsive teachers acquire a repertoire of strategies to learn about ELLs' language backgrounds and proficiencies so that instruction can be tailored to their needs (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). It is common knowledge that students succeed when their education is congruent with their needs.

To be able to provide appropriate instruction and to promote language development, teachers must also be able to *identify the linguistic demands* of classroom discourse (Lucas &

Villegas, 2011). This second element of the knowledge portion of Lucas and Villegas' (2011) framework is important because teachers cannot decide what tasks to scaffold and how best to scaffold until they identify the aspects of language inherent to those tasks that may pose difficulty (Lucas et al., 2008). Any analysis of language demands should be detailed to accurately identify what could interfere with ELLs' understanding (Lucas & Villegas, 2010). When teachers are equipped with the knowledge of the language of their discipline, they can make their content more accessible to their students (Lucas et al., 2008).

An understanding of the key principles of second language and the ability to apply this understanding in teaching ELLs is the third element of knowledge in Lucas and Villegas' (2011) framework. The key principles they refer to include the notion that conversational language proficiency differs greatly from academic language proficiency; ELLs need comprehensible input to acquire language; social interaction fosters language development; home language plays a crucial role in second language development as skills learned in L1 transfer to L2; language learning is enhanced when anxiety is reduced; and students feel safe in their learning environment (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Classroom teachers who know the difference between conversational proficiency and academic language proficiency may be less likely to make false assumptions about students' cognitive abilities. Moreover, they are more apt to understand when and how to provide ELLs in their classes with support to complete academic tasks successfully (Lucas & Villegas, 2011).

Furthermore, understanding academic language development can assist teachers in creating instruction that is responsive to gifted ELLs' needs while still providing complex work (Pereira & de Oliveira, 2015). Classroom teachers need to understand the role of linguistic input. A large portion of input in English will not foster language learning if the learners cannot

comprehend it. Therefore, teachers need to realize that ELLs need comprehensible input that is slightly above their current level of proficiency so to push learners beyond their current knowledge and skill in English which is necessary for pushing them beyond their current knowledge of academic content (Lucas et al., 2008).

Likewise, negotiation of meaning occurs not only with comprehensible input but with meaningful interaction (Lucas et al., 2008). Linguistically responsive teachers foster English language development by effectively employing strategies to adjust their speech and instruction while creating situations that lead to multiple forms of interactions in the classroom. Essential to teaching ELLs is the understanding that proficiency in one language is a valuable resource for learning a second language; students with literacy skills in their first language can more easily and quickly learn to read and write in a second language than those without such skills (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Therefore, teachers who are linguistically responsive encourage families to continue developing the home language. Linguistically responsive teachers also will work hard to promote ideal learning conditions which include minimizing anxiety and providing a welcoming environment (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). When classroom conditions are optimal, learning occurs.

The final element of the framework addresses the skill of providing *instructional scaffolding to promote ELL learning*. Linguistically responsive teachers are well prepared to provide the temporary supports ELLs need to access academic content (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Learning to scaffold is crucial as it helps teachers avoid simplifying tasks or diluting content. It aids students in constructing their understanding and can foster learner autonomy. Through scaffolding, teachers can provide academically challenging instruction for ELLs, and it is through challenging instruction that giftedness may be observed.

A linguistically responsive approach may not only adequately prepare teachers to support ELLs in attaining their potential, but it may make ELLs' giftedness more noticeable to trained teachers and it may lead to greater advocacy regarding GT identification. If trained in LRT, teachers would be more versed in recognizing the differences between BICS and CALP (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Understanding the distinction between these types of language can help avoid inaccurate assumptions regarding ELLs' abilities. If trained in LRT, teachers would have a better understanding of the linguistic demands of academic tasks and would be better equipped to address the role of academic language in their instruction thereby appropriately scaffolding their ELLs' needs, which in turn would help them develop academic proficiency in English (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Once students gain a certain level of proficiency, they can use English in academic settings and are more likely to be referred for GT programs (Pereira & de Oliveira, 2015).

Ensuring student success requires that educators have high expectations for all students regardless of their backgrounds; linguistically responsive teachers hold high expectations (Pereira & de Oliveira, 2015), and they possess the skills to scaffold learning (Lucas & Villegas, 2011) which can help ELLs meet these expectations. Linguistically responsive teachers also value linguistic diversity as an asset in their classrooms and therefore will not have a deficit view of their language learners (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Since deficit orientations reveal themselves in teachers' actions (Ford et al., 2008; Harry, 2008) overcoming such tendencies may lead to nominations of potentially gifted ELLs. Additionally, linguistically responsive teachers question language policies that discriminate against students and their languages. Training in LRT could help teachers learn how to take action to improve ELLs' access to educational opportunities. When trained to be advocates, teachers should be more inclined to examine previously held

beliefs. Reflecting on and questioning one's preconceptions about ELL students is crucial in LRT (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). The ability to be reflective could enable teachers to examine commonly held notions of giftedness. Behaviors considered by "Anglo-American" culture to be indicative of giftedness may not be present in students raised in a family that has contrasting values (Gubbins et al., 2018). True advocates would be able to realize that giftedness looks different within different cultures.

Various types of training could be a solution to the underrepresentation of ELLs in GT programs when teachers are tasked with identifying potential candidates. Awareness training is a way to highlight past misconceptions and deficit mindsets and is supported by the NAGC as they feel a multi-dimensional paradigm shift from a deficit to a strength perspective is necessary to ensure the unique abilities of these students are recognized (NAGC, 2021). Other trainings like learning how to be an LRT could also yield benefits. Teachers require assistance, and Olszewski-Kubilius and Clarenbach (2014) asserted that we must continue to highlight the need for professional development for all educators to identify and provide suitable educational opportunities for all high-ability and high-achieving children in their schools and classes.

Promoting Collaboration as a Solution

In addition to providing training to teachers, encouraging teachers to collaborate can be a solution to the underrepresentation of diverse students like ELLs. Collaboration is one of the components addressed in the NAGC *Pre-K–Grade 12 Programming Standards*. Under Programming Standard 5, which pertains to the continuum of services that address the interests, strengths, and needs of gifted and talented students in all contexts, Standard 5.4 states the following evidence-based practice "Educators regularly engage students, other educators, families, advocates, and community members in collaboration to plan, advocate for, implement,

and evaluate systematic, comprehensive, and ongoing services” (NAGC, 2019, p. 15). These standards are based on research, and the need for collaboration is evidenced by an examination of recent study findings. Allen’s (2017) study reported that the ELL teachers interviewed acknowledged that the classroom teachers are typically responsible for the gifted referral process and that they do not usually consult the ELL teachers concerning gifted referrals. Allen noted that ELL teachers felt that gifted referrals were a " path through the classroom teacher” " and that while ELL teachers may have had talks with classroom teachers about potential genius features in children, referrals "always kind of went back through the classroom teacher" (p. 83).

Teachers must collaborate and have effective discussions about kids in order to perceive them as full learners. This deliberate partnership between classroom teachers, ELL teachers, and gifted specialists would encourage more meaningful discussions about students and, ideally, a better rate of collaboration on gifted referral paperwork and evaluation checklists would result (Allen, 2017). The NAGC stressed the need for collaboration in its 2014 position statement. They contend that collaboration among gifted, general, special education, and related services professionals is essential in meeting the various needs of today's diverse student population (NAGC, 2014). They further assert that giftedness is a complicated phenomenon, and it is critical that educators work with one another and with parents/guardians to ensure that students are correctly recognized for services to fulfill their various advanced learning needs (NAGC, 2014).

Conclusion

Although more attention has been brought to the need to appropriately identify ELLs into programs that offer support or enrichment, this group in many districts remains underrepresented in gifted programs. As can be seen, this might be due to the significant power that classroom teachers have in determining who gets recommended. Szymanski and Shaff (2013) asserted, “As

gatekeepers to programming for gifted learners, teachers play an influential role in the educational experience of diverse, gifted students” (p. 22). Despite the fact that a referral procedure that relies on an individual to initiate it frequently does not result in equitable identification, it is a widespread practice in many states and districts. The National Association for Gifted Children State of the States Report which provides data on multiple aspects involved with policies and practices for gifted education includes the typical time of gifted identification; in at least 19 states, teacher referrals represent one of the most common times to identify gifted and talented students (NAGC & CSDGP, 2015).

Since mainstream teachers are the ones who work so closely with students and have countless opportunities to observe students’ abilities and knowledge, it seems logical that the starting point for addressing the issues related to the identification of ELLs in GT programs lies with the people most responsible for nomination-teachers (Gubbins et al., 2018). Training has been advocated by some researchers (Allen, 2017; Costello, 2017) as a way to address the underrepresentation of ELLs in gifted programs, and collaboration has been recommended by others (Allen, 2017; NAGC, 2014, 2019).

Because schools must ensure that gifted ELLs are referred accurately and equitably, analyzing teachers' impact on GT referrals, and identifying potential solutions is critical because ELLs may never have the opportunity to have their skills recognized by their classroom teachers otherwise. The United States Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (2015) clearly indicated that for schools to comply with their legal obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 they must take affirmative steps to ensure that ELLs can meaningfully participate in their educational programs and services. Prevention of access to appropriate education which includes GT programs is a clear violation of a student’s civil rights and warrants attention. We

must work to help teachers need to perceive the giftedness of ELLs in order to provide equitable educational opportunities.

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