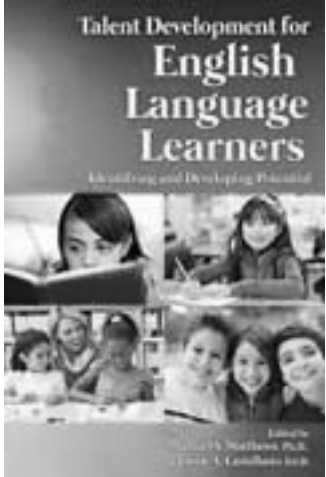


## Talent Development for English Language Learners: Identifying and Developing Potential

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Talent Development for English Language Learners: Identifying and Developing Potential		
<b>Author:</b>	Edited by: Michael S. Matthews, Ph.D. and Jaime A. Castellano, Ed.D. (2014)	
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U.S.-based educators working with English language learners (ELLs) of all ages have long known the difficulty of identifying students' true abilities and potential in light of language differences. Additionally, it is a well-documented problem that diverse populations are underrepresented in gifted programs in U.S. public schools. *Talent Development for English Language Learners: Identifying and Developing Potential* acknowledges these problems and addresses the surrounding issues with the goal of "broadening the reader's perceptions" (p. 9) both in terms of educational policy and practice and in raising awareness of ways to educate and encourage high ability students.

The stated goal is admirable considering the political and institutional nature of the forces that work against accurately identifying and supporting talent and potential in ELLs. In the introduction, the editors touch upon what is perhaps the heart of the problem: "Unfortunately, many people who are fluent in only one language (as most U.S. residents are) tend to view proficiency in their majority language as synonymous with intelligence; those who are not yet proficient in English must not be very smart, right?" (p. x). This underlying misconception is at work in political and educational policies, teacher education and attitudes, and classroom and school wide practices. The book challenges educators to honestly examine their own beliefs and practices with the goal of better serving high ability ELLs.

The book consists of nine chapters written by different authors. The chapters are grouped into three parts: What we know (Chapters 1-3); What we can do (Chapters 4-6), and, Taking a broader view (Chapters 6-8). Although there is some overlap of content, each chapter stands alone, and the editors encourage readers to first read the chapters that most directly address a topic of interest. Chapter 1 defines terms and ideas related to ELLs in US public schools. Other chapters address talent development, language development, and writing skills; gifted education in cross-cultural perspective; moving from deficit-based to strength-based perspectives; motivational strategies for students with gifts and talents who are learning English; building collaborative partnerships in schools and communities; using service learning to build effective policies and procedures; working within the system to build effective policies and procedures; and, a summary of major points and thoughts for the future research.

I note that in this review I touch only briefly on a selection of the strategies and practices included in the book that would benefit high achieving ELLs. Many other noteworthy ideas are not included.

Because of the broad array of topics covered in the book there is something of interest for a range of educators. Many aspects of the book lend themselves to the entry level teacher or teacher in training. For example, Chapter 1 gives an excellent overview of important terms and ideas related to the discussion of academic and language ability, additionally identifying some of the political and systemic influences that promote widespread under-education of students whose first or dominant language isn't English. Chapter 2 reviews the nature of second language development and the creative and cognitive benefits of bilingualism, and provides specific information to differentiate writing instruction for ELLs. This information is essential for a complete understanding of the ELL experience. However, unfortunately, Chapter 2 is somewhat disjointed; each subtopic seems to stand alone rather than to build a cohesive central argument.

Real-life issues are addressed that experienced classroom teachers, support teachers, and administrators regularly face. One of these is the rapidly changing demographics of the student population in U.S. public schools. U.S. schools are becoming increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse. Yet, teacher preparation and teacher demographics have remained largely the same. Chapter 3 acknowledges that classroom teachers are mostly responsible for recognizing and nominating students for gifted education programs. However, those teachers may not have the knowledge, awareness, or ability to identify talent in their students who are learning English. Additionally, teacher bias and cultural perspectives also play a part in limiting academic opportunities for high achieving students. To mitigate misunderstanding based on cultural perspectives, the chapter author includes a very interesting description of the gifted programs and policies of eight of the most common countries of origin for the U.S. immigrant population, as well as, specific strategies for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The book offers many other useful tools for experienced teachers and school personnel who desire to improve services for high achieving ELLs. Chapter 6

outlines a plan to build collaboration and collaborative partnerships within schools, as well as, between schools, home, and community in order to more effectively identify students with potential and talent and to serve them more productively. Included are scales designed to facilitate discussion among professionals as collaborative partnerships are built.

A fascinating topic for teacher and parents is the role of motivation in the academic achievement of students with gifts and talents. Chapter 5 provides a summary of important theories in the study of motivation that will help teachers understand their linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse students. Adults and/or teachers serve an important role in different aspects of student motivation. One example is found in the Resiliency Theory. According to the chapter author, "The existence of positive relationships with other individuals in the child's life is the key factor in developing resiliency, and it is here that the caring teacher can make a tremendous difference" (p. 104).

Chapter 4 may be of particular interest to seasoned educators. In it the authors argue that the very way we have framed our national discussion of Latino students in K-12 settings has promoted a deficit theory approach to programming and instruction. It challenges teachers to reframe the discussion to one of "achievement and potential" (p. 88) as a step to removing the barriers facing high ability transnational Latino students.

*Talent Development for English Language Learners: Identifying and Developing Potential* is an excellent resource for educators and parents. The strength of the book is the compilation of expert and experienced voices that illuminate the issues of giftedness and language from different perspectives. While the book provides broad guidelines to assist in identifying talent and potential in ELLs, student identification is one aspect that could be strengthened through additional emphasis and research. Considering the central role of the classroom teacher in identifying and supporting talent and potential, this text is particularly suitable for teacher education, teacher preparation, and professional development.

Although each chapter approaches advanced academic programming with a different focus and suggests different strategies to improve services for gifted learners, a common theme unites them. This theme returns to the original goal of the book. The first step in removing the barriers that high achieving English learners face is to increase awareness of one's own practices and biases, as well as, school and system wide practices and biases that limit access to advanced academic programming. Finally, it is up to a caring, perceptive adult to recognize a learner's talents and to support, nurture, and encourage a student's unique abilities.

**Reviewed by** Corie Crouch  
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
ccrouch1@uncc.edu

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