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Using Funds of Knowledge to Identify Bilingual Students' Gifts and Talents: The Role of Home Visits

This paper argues that home visits can play a critical role in identifying gifts and talents of bilingual students through students' funds of knowledge. Underrepresentation of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD), particularly bilingual children, in gifted programs has been a long-term concern in education. One problem of underrepresentation of bilingual students in gifted education is rooted in teacher under referrals of bilingual children for screening. Bilingual students exhibit gifted characteristics in differing ways than their peers from non-diverse backgrounds (Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012). Students' funds of knowledge frame their patterns of learning, knowing, and doing around their unique cultural and linguistic experiences and can serve as a valuable resource in the gifted and talented screening process. The purpose of the paper is to promote the use of home visits as an alternative talent screening approach to assist teachers in the identification of bilingual students' potential characteristics of giftedness through students' funds of knowledge.

Keywords: Culturally and linguistically diverse, bilingual, gifted, home visit, funds of knowledge

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Gifted Education

Gifted and talented education programs do not reflect the current cultural and linguistic diversity of U.S. public schools (Gubbins et al., 2018; Mun et al., 2016; Plucker & Callahan, 2014). Bilingual students, categorized as English learners (ELs), or students whose home language is other than English and have not yet achieved specified levels of English proficiency, make up over 11 percent of the total school-age population, yet less than 3% of ELs are represented in gifted education (United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Underrepresentation of bilingual students in gifted education has been a historical, long-withstanding concern (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Esquierdo & Arregun-Anderson, 2012; Ford, & Grantham, 2003; Gubbins et al., 2018; Siegle et al., 2016) and commands a sense of urgency as students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds are expected to make up 55% of the U.S school population by 2027 (NCES, 2019). These data indicate the importance of schools and districts in identifying the contributing factors leading to the underrepresentation of students from diverse backgrounds in gifted programs.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) defines gifted and talented individuals as "….children or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities."(*Title VIII, Part A, Section 8101 of ESSA*,2015). Gifted education programs in schools aim to maximize opportunities for children/youth to recognize and advance their gifts and talents, enhance their capacity to utilize their gifts and talents, and to become problem solvers, critical thinkers, innovators, and contributors to society (Renzulli, 2012). Without the services and support provided through gifted education programs, students' untapped giftedness may lead to social, emotional and academic challenges (Renzulli, 2012).

It is imperative for educators to recognize that giftedness exists in all cultures and across all languages (Lewis, DeCamp-Fritson, Ramage, McFarland, & Archwamety, 2007). Exceptional intellect, creativity, discipline knowledge, and leadership are characteristics of giftedness. These characteristics exist across all cultures yet are exhibited in culturally and linguistically specific ways to the individual. Traditional gifted assessments and educators' understanding of giftedness from a native English-speaking perspective disadvantages bilingual student from being appropriately identified for and to receive gifted education serves. he development of culturally relevant strategies to increase the representation of CLD students in gifted education deserves priority(National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC), 2011).

Bilingual students tend to exhibit characteristics of giftedness differently from students who were born into the U.S. mainstream culture (Esquierdo & Arregun-Anderson, 2012; Siegle et al., 2016). Often, bilingual students do not have sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and academic skills in the general education setting due to language barriers, cultural biases, socio-economic levels, or disabilities. They have limited opportunities to express knowledge that does not depend on English proficiency (Siegle et al., 2016). These challenges make it difficult for bilingual students to be identified as gifted through traditional methods (e.g., cognitive ability and intelligence test, nonverbal cognitive ability test, achievement test, rating scales). It is critical for educators to use culturally and linguistically sensitive approaches to identify the gifts and talents of bilingual students (Gubbins et al., 2018; NAGC, 2011). Culturally and linguistically sensitive approaches would minimize measures that are heavily dependent on language proficiency and disregard the cultural aspect of the giftedness.

Several factors contribute to the inadequate representation of bilingual students in gifted programs. These factors include: (a) the lack of teacher referrals (Ford, 2010; Siegle et al., 2016); (b) problems with the identification and placement process (Ford et al., 2008; Lewis et al., 2007; Mun et al., 2016); c) parental awareness and knowledge of giftedness (Grantham, Frasier, & Roberts, 2005); (d) deficit thinking of educators (Ford, 2010); and (e) socioeconomic status of students (Ford et al., 2008; Miller, 2009; Siegle et al., 2016). Unfortunately, many of the factors contributing to the under-representation of bilingual students in gifted education result from teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of giftedness and how it may manifest in different ways across cultures and languages. We argue that bilingual student underrepresentation in gifted programs is primarily rooted in under referrals by teachers. It is essential to recognize that teachers are gatekeepers who determine whether students will be

referred for gifted identification and received appropriate services (Swanson, 2006).

Therefore, the purpose of the paper is to promote the use of home visits as an alternative talent screening approach to assist teachers in the identification of bilingual students' potential characteristics of giftedness through students' funds of knowledge. This paper will (a) describe the characteristics of giftedness in bilingual students, (b) explain how home visits can be an alternative approach to talent screening through incorporating of students' the funds of knowledge, and (c) provide suggestions for preparing and conducting home visits.

Teachers are more likely to refer CLD students, including bilingual students, for gifted screening if students show unusual interests and achievement in reading and math (Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010) and demonstrate strong work habits (Moon & Bringhton, 2008). Additionally, if students have siblings in gifted education, they are more likely perceived as potentially gifted, and teachers are more inclined to refer these students for gifted evaluation (Siegle et al., 2010). On the other hand, teachers are less likely to nominate students for gifted assessment if students qualify for free or reduced lunch (McBee, 2006). Students who have been retained, are deficient in an academic area, or demonstrate a lack of motivation are also less likely to be recognized as having gifted tendencies by teachers (Pierce, Adams, & Neumeister, 2007). Furthermore, students are less likely to be referred for gifted evaluations if they are classified as English Learners (Siegle et al., 2016). Underachievement or behavioral problems are also persistent roadblocks for gifted referrals for students from diverse backgrounds, including bilingual students, who may be labeled as limited English proficient (Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007).

Besides misunderstandings surrounding gifted and talented students from CLD backgrounds, many teachers also feel under-prepared to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of these students (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010). Understandably, this lack of preparation affects their ability to recognize the characteristics of giftedness in CLD students. Thus, deepening teachers' understanding of giftedness is critical to improving the identification and support services for gifted bilingual students (Esquierdo, & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Ford, & Grantham, 2003; Moon & Brighton, 2008). Teachers with more training tend to recognize the signs of giftedness in students easily (Siegle et al., 2010). Developing teachers' understanding of how giftedness might manifest across different cultures and languages would increase opportunities for bilingual students to be referred for gifted screening.

Characteristics of Giftedness and Considerations for Bilingual Students

Typically, teachers identify common characteristics of giftedness in students as (a) possessing a broad range of knowledge; (b) having an extensive vocabulary; (c) being able to see patterns and relationships; (d) having the ability to draw conclusions; (d) enjoying discovery; (e) generating original ideas; and (f) being easily bored wben not challenged (Clark, 2008; Miller, 2009). However, bilingual students who are gifted may not exhibit these characteristics in the same ways as their peers who are not from a diverse background. Bilingual students, with an array of cultural and linguistic experiences, may therefore demonstrate their skills using different methods or they may choose to hide their giftedness (Siegle et al., 2016). Table 1 summarizes the most common characteristic of giftedness that might be challenging to observe in bilingual students through traditional lenses.

Table 1
Characteristics of Giftedness and Considerations for Bilingual Students

Traditional Characteristics of Giftedness	*Consideration for Bilingual Students*
Enjoy solving puzzles	

Do things in an unusual way	What are the perceptions of giftedness in different cultures? Are these characteristics manifested in other ways?
Generate original ideas	
Ask many questions	
Organize and lead group activities	What are the cultural and linguistic effects on interaction with others? Does language proficiency/lack of native language opportunity impact interaction?
Independence in work and study	
Verbally sophisticated	How does students' English proficiency impact their communication? Do students display these characteristics in their native language? Collectively between both languages?
Extensive vocabulary	
Has a keen sense of humor	

Teachers may view bilingual students' developing English proficiency and cultural "differences" as deficits because they do not "match" those of the mainstream classroom. Teachers may fail to realize that although students may not be fluent in English, students can still be gifted in other areas and gifted services can strengthen their "weaknesses" in the long term. (Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Neumeister et al., 2007). It is imperative to shift from "deficit" perspective to "dynamic" view to recognize, identify and serve potentially gifted CLD students for gifted services (Ford, & Grantham, 2003). Therefore, bilingual students need opportunities to express their knowledge, skills, and unique gifted characteristics in ways which are not dependent on English proficiency (Siegle et al., 2016). Students' funds of knowledge can be used in the talent screening approach of giftedness for bilingual students.

Getting at Giftedness: Funds of Knowledge

Funds of knowledge encompass the knowledge and skills students acquire in the home through experiences with the family and within the community (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Often, the cultural and linguistic resources embodied in students' funds of knowledge are viewed through a deficit lens when brought to the classroom. Students' resources fall outside of what is valued and considered legitimate in the school setting (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Students' funds of knowledge, however, frames students' patterns of learning, knowing, and doing around their unique cultural and linguistic experiences (Gonzalez et al. 2005; Moll et al., 1992). Funds of knowledge allow educators to view students' resources through the lens of their cultural and linguistic upbringings from asset-based perspectives. The funds of knowledge framework has been applied to many bilingual educational contexts, including engineering, science, math, and literacy (Amaro-Jiménez, & Semingson, 2011).

Developing an understanding of students' funds of knowledge requires comprehensive and in-depth knowledge of students inside and outside of the classroom. One of the most critical steps that educational leaders can take is establishing productive home and school connections with bilingual students and their families (NAGC, 2011). Home visit programs hold tremendous potential as a culturally and linguistically relevant communication tool between teachers and bilingual parents, giving an exceptional insight into students' funds of knowledge. Moreover, this approach has the potential to shift the teacher's perspective from deficit to asset-based (Amaro-Jiménez, &

Semingson, 2011). Amaro-Jiménez and Semingson (2011) describe home visits as an "ongoing and systematic" process that allows educators to gather valuable information while strengthening the home-school connections.

Home visits are not new to teachers in the U.S. Traditionally home visits have been associated with efforts for (a) encouraging teachers to design their instruction based on the funds of knowledge of their students (Moll et al., 1992), (b) improving student behavior and academic achievement (Wright et al., 2018; Stetson et al., 2012), (c) increasing parent involvement (Manz, 2012; Stetson et al., 2012;Whyte & Karabon, 2016), (d) recruiting athletics for sports (Dumond et al., 2018), and (e) providing an early intervention in early childhood education (Manz, 2012). For example, Head Start programs have been using home visits as a positive tool to identify early interventions that students might need in preschool (Manz, 2012). Moll and Gonzalez (1994) worked with Arizona teachers to implement teacher home visits to better understand the whole child in terms of what type of knowledge exists in their home environment and then incorporated this knowledge into their literacy instruction (Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). Wright et al. (2018) investigated the impact of home visits on student outcomes and reported that home visits increase positive behaviors, improve academic achievements, and positively impact student motivation in addition to increasing parent involvement (Wright et al., 2018).

Home Visits as a Culturally Relevant Talent Screening Tool

Home visits have several advantages over traditional gifted identification tools. First, unlike other identification tools, home visits are primary sources of students' lives, experiences, and cultural, linguistic and cognitive resources (Lin & Bates, 2010; Moll et al., 1992; Whyte, & Karabon, 2016). Second, these non-academic settings allow educators to shift from being a teacher to a learner (Lin & Bates, 2010; Reyes et al., 2016). Lastly, home visits have a demonstrated impact on student and parent attitudes toward school and teachers as well as on an improved home-school connection (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Peralta-Nash, 2003).

Home visits are a powerful tool to access bilingual students' cognitive, linguistic and cultural resources available in the home (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Reyes, Da Silva Iddings, & Feller, 2016). It allows teachers to understand how families use their knowledge to deal with everyday situations (e.g., problem-solving skills) and to understand the nature of the social connection and networks within the family. Therefore, as a talent screening tool, home visits provide opportunities to observe and learn about bilingual students' problem-solving skills, communicative language skills, literacy skills, and contributions to the family's daily life. Further, teachers can observe social interactions that are often difficult for the students to demonstrate in the classroom due to their emergent bilingual skills. Home visits are an opportunity to find out different types of intelligence (e.g., musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, linguistic, and leadership) and to discover the potential not demonstrated and acknowledged at school. Observing the cognitive, linguistic and cultural resources of students leads to designing learning experiences that connect the two worlds of a bilingual students. Accessing students' funds of knowledge through home visits also supports teacher in the building of more inclusive classrooms in which bilingual students' cultural, linguistic and cognitive resources are integrated into the classroom and instruction (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Whyte & Karabon, 2016).

For successful home visits, the teachers' role needs to shift from being an authoritative teacher figure to a learner. Research indicates that when teachers enter the family's home as authoritative figure to share school agenda (e.g., grades) they may have difficulties recognizing the funds of knowledge that exist in home (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Home visits promote teachers entering students' houses as a teacher-researcher to learn, not to teach. They increase a teacher's desire to learn and connect with students and their families as they enable educators to learn information about the student that cannot be gathered through traditional communication (i.e., family dynamics, how knowledge is constructed, type of support available at home). They also help teachers to connect with their students and families, strengthen bonds between them, and develop a sense of empathy for the bilingual students as they work together to identify the gifts and talents. Home visits also provide teachers the space to reflect on their biases and confront on their deficit perspectives towards students' abilities and interest (Amaro-Jiménez, & Semingson, 2011, Moll et al., 1992; Stetson et al., Reyes, Da Silva Iddings, & Feller, 2016; Whyte & Karabon, 2016).

As educators shift from being a teacher to a learner, they have opportunities to access another source of information about the student beyond standardized test scores and classroom performance. This provides educators the opportunity to realize the gifts and talents of a whole child within his/her surroundings. Additionally, such visits increase teachers' awareness of interest, values, and needs that may not be recognized in the classroom and which can lead to increases in bilingual students being referred to gifted and talented education services (Meyer et al., 2011).

Home visits are a powerful tool to strengthen the home-school connection (Moll et al.,1992; Stetson et al., 2012). Further, the idea of home visits aligns with the NAGC (2005) standards, suggesting that educators collaborate with families from diverse backgrounds in accessing resources to develop their child's talents. Hence, as a talent screening tool, home visits allow teachers to collaborate with families in accessing resources to identify their child' talents, positively influence bilingual parents' perception of giftedness, increase opportunities for parent awareness about gifted education services, and lastly increase parent advocacy. (Lin & Bates, 2010; Meyer et al., 2011).

Getting at Giftedness: Putting Home Visits into Practice

Even though home visits offer a promising practice to bring students' background knowledge and experiences into the school curriculum, educators need to have clear guidelines to conduct those visits (Spies, Morgan, & Matsuura, 2014). To address this point, before schools begin making home visits, they must have: (a) a school-wide vision for the role of home visits in talent screening for bilingual students; (b) clearly delineated procedures for conducting home visits; (c) professional development for teachers; and (d) home visit follow up.

To begin, establishing a vision for alternative talent screening approaches through home visits is essential. School should set a protocol for talent screening. Prior to conducting home visits, school-wide procedures need to be established. These include the selection of students, communication with parents regarding home visits, and expectations during and following the home visit. After establishing a school-wide vision for talent screening via home visits, the school can move to provide school-wide professional development. Teachers must not only be able to identify the characteristics of giftedness but understand how these characteristics manifest themselves across cultural and linguistic diversity. Professional development should also include a deep understanding of the role of funds of knowledge in demonstrating students' patterns of learning and knowing. After the professional development of all educators, teachers have a thorough understanding of the implications of the identification of giftedness in bilingual students. Table 2 summarizes some of the necessary steps to consider in preparing teachers and establishing a vision and procedures for home visits.

Table 2
Establishing a Vision and Procedures for Home Visits

School-wide Professional Development
Characteristics of giftedness
Role of culture and language in characteristics of giftedness
Funds of knowledge
Role of home visits

Establish a School-Wide Vision for Talent Screening Via Home Visits
Engage stakeholders in vision setting for talent screening via home visits
Set norms for talent screening
Collaborate with art, music, physical education, science, and math teachers to create activities and learning experiences independent of English language proficiency.

Establish Procedures for Home Visit
Survey teachers to nominate possible students to be visited
Determine members of the home visit team
Send requests to parents about visiting their homes; notify them of the purpose

Secure an interpreter (if needed)
Schedule a visit
Research family culture

At the beginning of a home visit, teachers should clearly explain the purpose of the visit and reassure parents that the focus of the visit is only their student (Byrd, 2012). After a warm introduction and purpose of visits explained, teachers should explain giftedness to parents and what it means to be gifted. Specifically, they should explain that giftedness manifests in different ways that cannot always be measured through traditional paper-pencil assessments. Teachers should inform parents that they have a series of questions they would like to ask to parents to understand how their child thinks, problem solves, creates, etc. Then, begin asking about family dynamics, discuss students' interest, hobbies, and strengths, and ask parents their dreams and aspirations for their kids. These questions can include: *When your child comes from school what activities would he/she like to do? Are there any activities or hobbies would you like to share with us? How many languages do you speak at home? Is there any special holiday or traditions you would like to share with me?? What are your child's responsibilities at home? How often/long does your child read at home? Does your child like to watch tv? What are his/her favorite shows? Are there any after school activities such as sport, music, or art that your child is involved in? What are your dreams and hopes for your child? Do you have any suggestions that will help me to become a better teacher for your child? What else would you like me to know about your child?* Teachers close the home visits restating the purpose of the visits, thanking families for allowing them into their homes, and invite them to be part of the classroom learning community.

During the visit, it is important that visitors are aware of and follow the cultural norms of the household. For example, *what are the norms in terms of interactions between men and women? What are the expectations surrounding the accepting and declining food or drink?* If an interpreter is present, educators should ensure they are knowledgeable of the student and family prior to arriving at the home. Table 3 highlights the recommended format for conducting the home visit.

Table 3
Conducting the Home Visit

Sample Home Visit Procedure
☐ Warm introduction
☐ Inform parent about the purpose of the visits
☐ Ask about the family dynamic
☐ Discuss with parents students' interest, hobbies, and strengths
☐ Discuss with parents their dreams and aspiration for their kids
☐ Ask parents about students' after school activities
☐ Ask the student if they would like to share/demonstrate any of their favorite activities, or hobbies

Upon conclusion of the home visit, teams should come back together to discuss the outcomes and challenges of the home visit program. Each teacher should reflect on the following questions to guide teams in debriefing home visits and to guide their continued professional development. *What did you learn about the student that you did not know prior to a home visit? How can you use this information to reconstruct your instruction to nurture the bilingual learners' gifts and talents to support their identification?*

During this phase, teams should determine which students are candidates for referral for further gifted evaluations. This is also the time for teams to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the home visit process. Teams

consider the need for additional professional development, the effectiveness of protocols in gathering pertinent information, and families and teachers comfort with the process. In order to achieve these outcomes, possible discussion topics may include (a) home visit procedures (e.g., discuss future modifications to home visit process, protocols), (b) what was learned about each student individually (e.g., discuss each student, create a list of potential nominees), (c) outcomes from the home visits (e.g. parent/teacher enjoyment, appreciation), and (d) what topic needs to be addressed future professional development needs.

Conclusions

Home visits are valuable and have an impact on educators' perspectives while teaching diverse students (Linn, & Bates, 2010). Although there is evidence to support home visits in improving student outcomes (i.e., achievement, behavior, parent involvement), there is no current evidence-base on the benefits of home visits on students who are bilingual and underrepresented in gifted education services. Future research should focus on developing the home visit program specifically for gifted screening purposes. Non-academic and non-traditional communication methods, such as conducting guided home visits, will provide a method to find the hidden gifts and talents of bilingual students. The underrepresentation of students who are bilingual in gifted education is a "tragic waste of human potential: the concerto never was written, the scientific discovery never made, the political solution never found" (Gallagher & Kinney, 1974, p. vii). All teachers, parents, and other stakeholders must provide opportunities for students who are gifted and bilingual to be discovered and their full potential to be revealed.

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