

Gifted Hispanic Bilingual Children:

How Do We Identify Them in Our Classroom?

Have you observed an elementary bilingual classroom where a couple of students stand out with their unique questions and unseeingly answers? These students wonder about topics that may not be directed connected to the current topic being discussed in class. Their comments tend to puzzle their peers and sometimes their teacher. Their language develops at accelerated rates that impress other students and educators. Yes, these students are different; they are gifted. The academic needs of bilingual¹ gifted students require extra attention, additional planning, and an increase in challenge. But, before we discuss how to teach bilingual gifted students, let's first figure out how to best identify them in the classroom.

Let's start with the general definition for giftedness. The Department of Education defined gifted and talented as *children and youth with outstanding talent performance or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields.* This definition is inclusive to students that show the potential to be gifted compared to others from their own environment. However, in addition to understanding the general definition of giftedness, bilingual teachers need to have a strong understanding of how to best identify the characteristics of bilingual gifted students.

Giftedness in bilingual students needs a unique definition that is specific to the population's characteristics. Lara-Alecio and Irby (2000) defined gifted Hispanic students as those who possess above average intelligence, task commitment, and creativity, considering the socio-linguistic-cultural context. They identified 11 characteristics that are unique to Hispanic bilingual gifted students:

1. **Motivation for learning:** Students demonstrate a value for education through good school attendance and exhibit a desire for learning, are persistent, and have a sustained motivation to succeed in school.
2. **Social & Academic learning:** Students not only like to read, speak, listen, and write in their native language, but they are also expressive, elaborate, and fluent in verbal behaviors.
3. **Cultural sensitivity:** Students appear to have pride in their language and culture, respect for traditional cultural and linguistic patterns and a value for oral tradition and history of the native culture.
4. **Familial:** Students exhibit a "Caretaker" personality within the family and respect for authority figures. However, this characteristic may be perceived as non-gifted trait, since gifted identification scales tend to equate non-conformity toward authority and independent thought with superior abilities.

¹ For this paper, bilingual students are children that have a home language other than English, and are learning English in the school environment.

5. **Collaboration:** The students have ability to lead and work in groups. They also have a keen sense of justice.
6. **Imagery:** They tend to exhibit language rich imagery and appear to be imaginative in storytelling.
7. **Support:** Students tend to respond favorably and perform better when the teachers express confidence in their abilities. Teachers need to support their area of interest and enrich their academic environment.
8. **Achievement:** They have the ability to generalize learning to other areas and to show relationships among apparently unrelated ideas.
9. **Creative performance:** Students have attributes that deal with creative productivity in the arts. They are perceived to be creative in lyric production to songs with more creativity exhibited in groups.
10. **Problem solving:** Students are more likely to be global learners who complete tasks in a patient, non-hurried manner, yet effective and accurate.
11. **Locus of control:** Students demonstrate their internal locus on control by believing that his/her behavior is guided by his/her personal decisions and efforts. Additionally, students have a keen sense of observation of expectations from society and desire to meet those expectations. This is referred to as an external locus of control.

As much literature has noted, teachers are key in identifying and servicing gifted bilingual students. In fact, teachers are many times the first stage of the identification process. Therefore, it is critical that bilingual teachers recognize the characteristics of giftedness in their students. All children deserve the opportunity to shine in their potential. Properly identifying bilingual gifted students is taking one step closer to quality education.

References:

- Lara-Alecio, R., & Irby, B. J. (2000). The culturally and linguistically diverse gifted. In C. Reynolds (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Special Education* (Vol. 1, pp. 506-510). New York: John Wiley & Son.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1993). *National excellence: A case for developing America's talented*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved on May 7, 2005, from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/DevTalent/part2.html>