

# Perspectives on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive RtI Pedagogics Through a Cultural and Linguistic Lens

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Response to intervention (RtI) originates from national legislation and critical research of evidence-based practices for low performing students and students at-risk of failing or receiving special education services. RtI proactively facilitates culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. With evidence-based practices, RtI when infused with culturally responsive pedagogy, has the potential to decrease the over-representation of CLD students in special education. This article examines RtI through a cultural and linguistic lens, addresses implementation challenges for CLD students, and emphasizes the importance of a culturally and linguistically responsive RtI approach that connects students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and learning styles to the academic and performance skills they need to learn and know.

*Keywords:* response to intervention (RtI), culturally and linguistically diverse students, IQ-achievement discrepancy model

**R**esponse to intervention (RtI) is built on the tenets of national legislation and critical research involving evidence-based practices. It was designed to target low performing students, students at-risk of failing, and students needing special education services because of academic and behavioral challenges (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; NASDSE, 2005; Orosco, 2010). Introduced by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), RtI offers promise for addressing the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in special education (Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012; Shealey, McHatton, & Wilson, 2011). Prior to RtI, federal legislation supported the IQ-achievement discrepancy model, or the "wait to fail approach." This model placed CLD students at a higher risk for misidentification and inappropriate placement in special education (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; Haager, 2007; White, Polly, & Audette, 2012).

Problems with the IQ-achievement discrepancy model is evident when considering the academic struggles of English Language Learners (ELLs), especially in situations where reading remediation is delayed until a threshold of reading failure is reached before being considered for

special education (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). This approach to intervention was problematic and resulted in a disproportionate number of CLD students being identified for special education services (White et al., 2012). When using the IQ-achievement discrepancy model, CLD students who demonstrate minimal lags in reading generally do not receive interventions until the delays were significant. Because of the procedural latent responsiveness to intervention posed by this model, researchers examining its effectiveness (e.g., Haager, 2007; Proctor et al., 2012) determined that the IQ-achievement discrepancy model was pedagogically inappropriate for meeting the immediate instructional needs of CLD, low achieving, and at risk students. It was also identified as a major contributor to the misclassification and disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education (Artiles & Trent, 1997; Tomlinson & Kalbfleisch, 1998; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2000).

When teachers lack an understanding of CLD students' prior knowledge, heritage, customs, language, learning preferences, interests, etc. (Tomlinson & Kalbfleisch, 1998; Vaughn et al., 2000), it can affect their ability to provide effective instruction (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Standardized IQ measures used to assess students' abilities also have inherent cultural and linguistic biases that contribute to the overrepresentation of CLD students in special education (Batsche et al., 2006). According to Proctor et al. (2012), biased IQ measures have contributed to the misdiagnosis of many CLD students, especially in the category of specific learning disability (SLD), emotional disturbance (ED), and intellectual disability (ID). Among the other factors that can affect teachers' pedagogical effectiveness is the environment in which teachers work (e.g., a wide range of instructional needs to accommodate student learning differences; limited or no time for co-planning, if working collaboratively; lack of resources; and not enough time available for assessment, monitoring, and tracking progress).

RtI is the most promising approach for not only addressing the learning and behavioral challenges of CLD students but also the overrepresentation of these students in special education. This article examines RtI through a cultural and linguistic lens by addressing implementation challenges for CLD students and emphasizing the importance of a culturally and linguistically responsive RtI approach that connects students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and learning styles to the academic and performance skills they need to learn and know.

### **RtI Through a Cultural and Linguistic Lens**

RtI is a multi-tiered approach to early intervention. It is designed to prevent underachievement and support students before they experience significant failure. This framework shows promise in accomplishing two significant goals related to CLD students (Garcia & Ortiz, 2006). First, it offers CLD students an opportunity to improve English literacy skills via evidence-based practices (Morris & Cortez, 2008). Secondly, it provides a systematic approach for addressing the disproportionate representation of CLD learners eligible for special education services (Proctor et al., 2012; Shealey et al., 2011).

While there is widespread variation in how states implement RtI, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Stecker (2010) assert that most stakeholders assume there is a general consensus about RtI, which in reality, is not the case. Rather, they propose that there are two loosely configured camps—the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act group and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Act group. From their exploratory view of RtI, Fuchs et al. describe their perceptions of how each group thinks. Accordingly, they assert that the NCLB group places a strong emphasis on learning curriculum standards and believe that curriculum assessments reflect mastered skills rather than evidence for special education eligibility. They also posed that this group foresees reading problems as gaps in need of remediation as opposed to genuine learning problems.

Alternatively, the vision of RtI from the perspective of the IDEA group is that the IDEA group is a proponent of the standard treatment protocol intervention approach (Fuchs et al., 2010). While this intervention approach necessitates a decision-making team, its distinguishing feature is a strong reliance on providing evidence-based practices to students demonstrating predictable reading problems (Batsche et al., 2006). Also, this approach is time-sensitive in that it specifies the duration and frequency of the intervention. In addition, emphasis is placed on level of specificity and structure that facilitates decision-making regarding intervention intensity and exploration of eligibility determination for tier advancement or non-advancement based on student progress. While the IDEA and NCLB groups share some commonalities (e.g., both support the intent of RtI and its tiered approach to intervention; both advocate for the early identification of low achieving and at-risk students), they have different visions regarding the nature and purpose of RtI (Fuchs et al., 2010).

RtI plays a critical role in the identification of students with disabilities who need special education services and supports. While some RtI models include four tiers, the most familiar graphic representation of RtI is the three-tiered triangle model. Within this model, each tier represents a level of intensity for instructional intervention. Depending on the student's responsiveness, the intensity of the instruction may increase at each successive tier (Batsche et al., 2006). Tier 1 represents the lowest level of intervention; Tiers 2 and 3 represent more intensive levels of intervention. Approximately 80% of the students receive intervention at Tier 1, approximately 15% at Tier 2, and approximately 5% benefit from the most intensive interventions provided at Tier 3 (Pullen, Tuckwiller, Konold, Maynard, & Coyne, 2010). In the RtI framework, the interventions used across the tiers are evidence-based and supported by research (Center for Response to Intervention, 2014).

According to the Center on Response to Intervention (2014), RtI provides a means by which "schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities" (p. 7). This center is designed to assist educators, policymakers, administrators, and researchers in meeting RtI challenges; encourage stakeholders, at all levels, to give special attention to fidelity of implementation; and place emphasis on cultural and linguistic responsiveness and the recognition of student strengths.

Implementing instructional practices has inherent challenges (Gerber, 2003), which increases as efforts are made to implement culturally and linguistically appropriate RtI pedagogy in classrooms with fidelity (Gargiulo, 2014). What researchers cite as most problematic (Artiles, 2002; Gee, 2001) is the lack of evidence-based practices that are contextually valid for CLD students. For example, some researchers fail to include language dominance and proficiency as variables or they insufficiently describe participants' demographic characteristics thus rendering

the study findings questionable with tenuous external validity (Artiles, Trent, & Kuan, 1997; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Simmerman & Swanson, 2001). When instructional practices are touted as effective, it is critical to understand for what student population the prescribed interventions are intended (Klinger & Edwards, 2006). Although obtaining materials and resources that match the customs and traditions of CLD students can be challenging, understanding their diverse backgrounds can also be challenging. Regardless, teachers should interpret the life experiences of CLD students as instructional assets rather than deficits for remediation, and they should use this information to develop culturally responsive pedagogy (Garcia & Ortiz, 2006; Nichols, Rupley, Webb-Johnson, & Tlusty, 2000; Shealey & Callins, 2007). Because of the critical need for teachers to understand CLD students' educational needs, cultural norms, and social behaviors that impact learning, the subsequent sections of this article examines the RtI three-tiered framework for CLD students from a cultural and linguistic lens.

### *Tier 1 Instructional Intervention and CLD Students*

Tier 1 is the core curriculum, which is applicable to all students. Schools make every effort to ensure that the curriculum chosen is appropriate. While it may not be effective for all students, it is characterized by evidence-based practices as demonstrated by experimental and quasi-experimental studies that reveal academic gains for a majority of the students. While a more comprehensive view of what constitutes evidence-based practices is needed (Klinger & Edwards, 2006), the complex nuances that involve culture and language must be considered, especially when looking at the cultural representation of subjects participating in the validation process.

Instructional fidelity is a critical factor for all tiers. Failure to maintain a high degree of fidelity makes it difficult to determine the cause of learning difficulties experienced by CLD students (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Hernández Finch, 2012; Proctor et al., 2012). Reading difficulties, for example, may be the result of a poorly implemented curriculum or lack of culturally relevant materials, as opposed to a reading deficit or disability. If the core instructional programs lack fidelity in its implementation, the purposefulness of Tier 1, as well as the subsequent tiers, are compromised. The goal of RtI is to have fewer students in need of more intensive interventions, which occurs at Tier 2 and Tier 3 (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

Universal screening in the core content areas (e.g., reading, math) is the first step in the RtI model for identifying students with learning difficulties at risk for failure. These screenings, which consist of brief assessments, is an essential component of the instructional process that provides teachers with opportunities to determine which CLD students are struggling to learn and are performing at or below grade level (Jenkins, Schiller, Blackorby, Thayer, & Tilly, 2013). For early intervention initiatives, curriculum-based measures (CBMs) such as teacher-made assessments are particularly effective with CLD students. These measures use a criterion to screen student performance of school-related academic tasks (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005) and they provide reliable assessment measures of basic skills in reading and math (e.g., words per minute (wpm), fluency, comprehension, percent correct) (Blue & Alexander, 2009).

Teachers can use the screening outcomes of CLD students to formulate tier level judgments based on performance (Batsche et al., 2006). The totality of these measures not only presents a holistic view of a student's learning difficulties but also encourage collaborative opportunities

with teachers and other professionals. These collaborative opportunities can facilitate teachers use of interventions that are tempered with cultural and linguistic vitality (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Orosco, 2010; Vaughn & Ortiz, 2012). They can also help teachers understand the cultural and linguistic needs of CLD students, including linguistic proficiency, language dominance, second language acquisition development, and cultural life experiences (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008; Vaughn & Ortiz, 2012).

When teachers use culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogical methodologies, many CLD students benefit from small group and individualized differentiated instruction, which subsequently reduces the number of referrals for special education (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). At Tier 1, when culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogy is implemented, it helps develop the reading skills of CLD students because instruction is differentiated by academic needs (Proctor et al., 2012) that take into consideration students' cultural and linguistic differences. Differentiated instruction provides opportunity for linguistic accommodations, content re-teaching, and smaller, flexible student groupings (Brown & Doolittle, 2008), all of which facilitate reading development.

The socio-cultural aspects of CLD students are also important. Among the socio-cultural attributes that teachers should consider are, for example, language use or preference, social affiliations (e.g., friends and relationships), daily life experiences (e.g., foods, responsibilities, and chores), culture (e.g., traditions, identity, and values), and communication style (Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). Teachers' awareness of socio-cultural influences not only helps them scaffold instruction to a more appropriate academic level (Orosco, 2010), it also helps them form more positive teacher-student relations (NCCRESt, 2005). More importantly, by having knowledge of students' socio-cultural influences, it can assist in the development and implementation of a more balanced culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogical methodology that can help prevent CLD students from being misdiagnosed for special education services (Proctor et al., 2012).

For students from CLD backgrounds, such as ELLs, interventions at Tier 1 should focus on structured English and native language instruction for improving literacy and oral language skills. In a longitudinal study by Tong, Lara-Alecio, Irby, and Mathes (2011), the reading and oral language skills of 70 English and Spanish kindergarten students in treatment bilingual classrooms were compared with 70 kindergarten students in controlled bilingual classrooms through first grade. Instruction for the treatment group was conducted via two languages, using only one language during certain periods of instruction. By contrast, the control group received minimum state and district required ESL instruction. Results indicated that students in the treatment group acquired increased levels of oral dual language acquisition and reading. Findings from this study corroborate previous research by Tong, Lara-Alecio, Irby, Mathes, and Kwok (2008), which revealed that the same two-year intervention accelerated English academic oral proficiency among a larger sample of participants from a similar age group. The interventions used in both studies promoted students' learning by incorporating structured and direct instruction, ESL strategies, and context-embedded vocabulary learning.

## *Tier 2 Instructional Intervention and CLD Students*

Tier 2 instructional interventions are implemented when a student fails to demonstrate academic gains via differentiated instruction at Tier 1. Tier 2 offers students more intensive supplemental supports (Batsche et al., 2006; Hernández Finch, 2012; Vaughn & Ortiz, 2012) in the core content areas to avert further screenings and/or observations and progress monitoring that would delay implementation of more intensive interventions for students who are low achieving or at-risk of failure. Instruction at Tier 2 is provided in a smaller student-teacher ratio. Although this tier could be implemented by a general education teacher, it is best implemented by a specialized interventionist (e.g., Title I teacher, reading specialist, special education teacher, speech and language specialist) with more knowledge and experience in remediating academic deficits (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2013). A recent study by Jenkins et al. (2013) corroborates the use of more specialized interventionists at higher tier levels. In this study, which involved 62 elementary schools from across 7 states, it was reported that 77% of the schools surveyed used a reading specialist to implement more intensive reading strategies at Tier 2, with 63% using reading specialists at Tier 3.

Tier 2 is perceived as the gatekeeper for possible special education referrals (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). The goals of Tier 2 are to critically analyze and determine why students fail to make the expected progress in reading, and to avoid making special education referrals. At Tier 2, schools have the option of using a problem-solving approach, a standard treatment protocol approach, or a hybrid approach (i.e., a combination of the two).

Schools have used the problem-solving approach for over 20 years. This approach relies on an instructional team to identify interventions for individual students (USDE, 2007) and it is ideal for conducting functional assessments to determine students' academic strengths and weaknesses, which help drive instruction. Salient characteristics of the problem solving approach involve: (1) identification of the problem and determination of causation, (2) development of an action plan to address the problem, (3) implementation of the plan (i.e., the intervention), and (4) evaluation of the effectiveness of the plan.

The problem-solving approach captures the essence of RtI in that it is inclusive of all of the elements of Tiers 1, 2, and 3. Briefly stated, all students receive instruction using empirically validated techniques and academic progress is monitored (Tier 1). When a student's academic growth does not meet desired benchmarks, a school-based team intervenes to ensure that the student receive more intensive, individually tailored and small group instruction using evidenced-based interventions. These interventions are based on individual student needs and performance data, and are flexible enough to meet their academic challenges (Tier 2). Students who continue to underachieve (i.e., make inadequate process) and are at-risk of school failure, state and district policies are used to determine the options for students. This may involve the student receiving more intensive instruction using validated techniques (as determined by the school-based team) that is individualized or special education services, if a comprehensive evaluation determines the student has a disability (Tier 3) (USDE, 2007). With the problem-solving approach, decision-making is more fluid as teachers collect data, plan, adjust, monitor and evaluate student progress (Fuchs et al., 2010).

On the other hand, the standard treatment protocol approach is strongly supported by research. This approach consistently uses one intervention selected by the school-based team to address the multiple needs of students. With the standard treatment protocol, the individual delivering the intervention makes instructional decisions following a standard protocol. When students demonstrate similar academic challenges, they are presented with one, standard, research-based intervention, which is a major disadvantage for addressing skill deficits for struggling learners. Lastly, the prescribed intervention is delivered in a predetermined format that may address more than one skill set. When a single intervention is implemented in this manner, there is greater control for fidelity of implementation and monitoring (USDE, 2007) yet, it may not be effective for all students needing more intensive instruction.

Lastly, the hybrid approach, which is a mixed methodology, is comprised of the problem-solving and standard treatment protocol approach. Batsche et al. (2006) assert that the hybrid approach to intervention is most advisable for Tier 2. It works best because students' benefit from an academic plan customized to their unique needs, thus ensuring that appropriate and valid research-based interventions are selected (Searle, 2010).

In the case of CLD students, monitoring students' reading progress using a hybrid approach tempered with knowledge of students' cultural and linguistic differences can help teachers develop a culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogical methodology that engenders effective teaching. While validated approaches for native English speakers may seem appropriate for this population, there are instances in which adapted or differentiated instructional practices have proven more effective for some CLD students (McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, & Leos, 2005).

### *Tier 3 Intervention and CLD Students*

If a student continues to demonstrate below level expectation and a lack of adequate progress in response to the evidence-based interventions and differentiated instruction provided at Tiers 1 and 2, the student is then referred to Tier 3. At Tier 3, close progress monitoring continues and individual diagnostic assessments are administered to determine the specific skill patterns which need remediation (Hernández Finch, 2012). Remediation at Tier 3 occurs in very small groups and/or individually tailored; and the evidence-based practices implemented are more intensive than in the previous tiers. It is generally recommended that interventions at Tier 3 include 50 minutes/day of intensive instruction in addition to the 90 minutes of reading core instruction, with a student-teacher ratio not greater than 3:1 (Henley et al., 2008). While the most distinguishing feature of Tier 3 is the plausibility of processing a special education referral, Tier 3 services may or may not yield identification for special education.

For CLD students receiving intervention at Tier 3, it is important to ensure that the student's cultural and linguistic influences are examined before special education referral. A mismatch between teachers and CLD students in areas such as language, immigration status, economic status, and prior life experiences can lead to a referral. Poor academic responses of CLD students to life circumstances, which are often misinterpreted for learning disabilities (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013), can also lead to referral. Interestingly, the flowchart developed by Garcia and Ortiz (1988) more than twenty-five years ago still encapsulates questions that are intended to minimize teacher misinterpretations of CLD students who are struggling academically, and help them with

the decision-making process. Such questions include: Is the student experiencing academic difficulties? Are the curricula and instructional materials known to be effective for language minority students? Has the problem been validated? And, Is there evidence of systematic efforts to identify the source of difficulty and take corrective action? Answers to questions such as these can guide teachers in a self-assessment of their knowledge of students' cultural and linguistic proficiency, preferred teaching and learning styles, motivational influences, and so forth, as compared to the needs of CLD students. Similar questions have also emerged for ELLs, which focus on documenting observable behaviors across various learning contexts, identifying unique student characteristics, and considering previously attempted interventions (Hamayan, Marler, Sánchez-López, & Damico, 2013).

Thus, not considering the cultural and linguistic attributes of CLD students carries serious implications. For example, students may become disenfranchised with school and disengaged from the learning process, which can exacerbate their at-risk status and potential misidentification for special education (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013) with dismal outcomes. Research by Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, and Ortiz (2010) and Cartledge and Dukes (2009) have indicated that CLD and African American students in special education experience poor achievement, high levels of drop out, low participation in post-high school opportunities, and restrictive educational placements.

### **Challenges of RtI Implementation for CLD Students**

A major challenge in the implementation of RtI is teacher preparation and training (Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love, & Saenz, 2008; Kratochwill, Volpiansky, Clements, & Ball, 2007; Wiener & Soodak, 2008). A recent survey of 242 members of the Council of Administrators of Special Education revealed that 95% of the respondents believed lack of adequate preparation was a primary cause for experiencing difficulties in RtI implementation (Wiener & Soodak, 2008). Thus, if teachers are ill prepared to educate CLD students, implementation of a culturally and linguistically responsive RtI tiered approach becomes a more difficult process (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Schools with poorly designed RtI program that lack cultural and linguistic responsiveness and sufficient use of evidence or scientifically-based interventions increase the likelihood that CLD students will be misdiagnosed or inappropriately referred for special education services (Batsche et al., 2006; Vaughn & Ortiz, 2012).

Additionally, if teacher preparation programs fail to include curriculum content on educating CLD students, the quality of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy becomes questionable (Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008), thus making RtI implementation more challenging (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Having a curriculum that incorporates culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy is vital to the success of CLD students within schools implementing RtI (Orosco & Klingner, 2010).

### *Dimensions of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy*

Culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, according to Richards, Brown, and Forde (2006), is a form of instruction that supports the achievement of all students. It is learner-

centered and ensures that students' strengths are identified, nurtured, and used to increase student achievement.

Cultivating teacher buy-in to the concept of RtI poses a challenge in implementing RtI (Wiener & Soodak, 2008), particularly when it involves students with cultural and linguistic differences. RtI, is contingent on various interrelated factors such as having a clearly defined description of its purpose and teacher roles and responsibilities (Fuchs & Bergeron, 2013). Teacher expectations and the impact of these expectations on student achievement must also be clearly communicated (Khalifa, 2011).

The literature on RtI (e.g., Fuchs & Bergeron, 2013) has shown that teachers receiving professional development and training on RtI will more likely buy-in to this pedagogical approach; however, the degree to which they buy-in depends on the resources and materials available to support effective implementation and the extent of their involvement in the implementation, decision-making, and the planning process. Also important to buy-in, as noted by Fuchs and Bergeron, is the degree to which teachers have opportunities to discuss issues involving implementation, their philosophical differences, and the extent to which they believe RtI will produce positive results.

The quality of a RtI pedagogy is generally reflected in three primary dimensions—institutional, personal, and instructional—each of which are in continuous interaction with each other. Not only do these dimensions impact teaching, they also impact the student learning process and the effectiveness of the culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (Richards et al., 2006) employed in the RtI process.

*Institutional Dimension.* The first dimension, institutional, is a reflection of school administrators, school policies, and the value-system held by the school. This dimension addresses how the entire school organization relates to diversity (Richards, et al., 2006) and how these entities address the use of physical space and classroom arrangement that encourage cooperative work, which is shown to benefit CLD students (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011). It also addresses community involvement. The institutional dimension places emphasis on having effective teachers assigned to students with the greatest instructional needs, parent collaboration, and school policies that invite parents to be partners in education (Richards, et al., 2006). Failure to address the institutional dimension makes implementation of a culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogy more challenging (Richards et al., 2006) and less effective.

*Personal Dimension.* The second dimension, which could challenge the quality of culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogy, is personal. The personal dimension encapsulates the thoughts and emotions teachers experience as they become more culturally responsive (Richards et al., 2006). Personal reflection, examination, and reconciliation of biases are critical to the success of culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogy (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The significance of the personal dimension is most apparent when biases lead to a mismatch of value systems between teachers of European descent and CLD students (Gay, 2010). Teachers of European descent often have limited interactions, experiences, and knowledge of the customs and practices of CLD students (Gay, 2010). Similarly, CLD students may have limited

knowledge of the norms and practices of teachers of European descent. Such a mismatch in the classroom can result in a lack of understanding, which hinders the instructional quality of the teacher-student relationship. According to Harris-Murri, King, and Rostenberg (2006), when a class is characterized by a mismatch of value systems, the conduct of CLD students is often misinterpreted as inappropriate behavior. These misinterpretations frequently result in the removal of CLD students from the instructional setting to, for example, an alternative school or out-of-school suspension, thus causing them to miss vital instruction and fall further behind with their academics.

*Instructional Dimension.* The final dimension, instructional, is critical to the successful implementation of a culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogy. In this dimension, instructional materials, activities, and resources must match the cultural practices, norms, and language of the students (Richards et al., 2006). When the tools of instruction are incompatible with the experiences of CLD students, a serious disconnect and counterproductive relationship is likely to exist among teachers and students (Irvine, 1992; Irvine, 2010), which often manifests with CLD students either underachieving or dropping out of school (Richards et al., 2006). Conversely, schools that integrate culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogy into their curriculum demonstrate a value towards the identity of CLD students and their respective communities.

Thus, it can be theorized that schools exhibiting the institutional, personal, and instructional dimensions are pedagogically prepared to focus on the needs of CLD students. Further, it can be presumed that schools that demonstrate some, but not all of these characteristics, are ill prepared to meet the needs of CLD students within an RtI framework.

### **The “Why” of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive RtI Pedagogics**

Effective teachers provide quality instruction that infuses students’ culture in all aspects of the teaching-learning process. They understand that culture is not a static set of characteristics within students but rather a complex phenomenon that is learned, acquired through interaction, shared with others, and constantly changing (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Ovando, Combs, & Collier, 2006).

Similarly, language displays the same characteristics as culture, in that cultural and linguistic components interrelate to create observable patterns (Ovando et al., 2006). Effective teachers are attuned to such observable patterns and they integrate these cultural and linguistic components into differentiated lessons to better connect with CLD students (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Santamaria, 2009). Code-switching, the practice of mixing or moving back and forth between languages, is an example of a communicative strategy that teachers can use to scaffold English content to non-English speaking students in an effort to help them better understand concepts (Fennema-Bloom, 2010). Teachers who understand the importance and relevance of code-switching are better prepared to maximize the skills of CLD students (Orosco & Klingner, 2010).

Moreover, to ensure implementation of an effective culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogy, school districts must provide on-going professional development, training, (Fuchs & Bergeron, 2013), support, and feedback (Batsche et al., 2006). In the initial stages of

implementation, teachers need to be fully trained in the basic components of RtI (e.g., processes for screening, progress monitoring) and knowledgeable of their assigned roles, responsibilities, and data collection requirements. They should also know how progress-monitoring results will be interpreted in light of cultural and linguistic factors (Vaughn & Ortiz, 2012). Teachers knowledgeable of oral language development; early literacy; and students' home language, contextual considerations, and cultural backgrounds are more incisive and perceptive of how to interpret data. Their understanding of the differing linguistic and cultural factors can lead to improved decision-making regarding intervention selection, intensity, and tier level determination (Vaughn & Ortiz, 2012).

To increase the probability of teachers implementing a culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogical approach, researchers (e.g., Gay, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) suggest that they provide multiple activities to help students become more attuned to their personal biases and how these biases may impact instruction. Such activities may include thinking or writing activities that prompt introspective thought about motivations underlying actions and behaviors. Teachers should also be encouraged to consider specific interactions with CLD students and how they might respond. In addition, teachers should consider analyzing personal and family histories and reflect on how these influences contribute to their current understanding of CLD students. Analyzing personal events provides a venue for dispelling potential and current misconceptions of individuals from other races and ethnicities.

One strategy that can be used to enhance teachers' capacity for implementing culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy within an RtI configuration is acknowledging the importance of cultural and linguistic differences and commonalities among CLD students (Richards et al., 2006). Engaging students in lessons that allow them to share cultural norms, practices, and languages can serve to both validate and affirm students' identities (Richards et al., 2006), which is vital to helping teachers build classroom unity. Lessons focusing on multiculturalism are also important. Such lessons can minimize misconceptions about certain behaviors exhibited by CLD students (e.g., the way Latin American children show respect to adults, which involves looking down when spoken to). By communicating with CLD students and their families, and visiting their neighborhoods, teachers can better conceptualize students' instructional needs (Richards et al., 2006). Such involvement can help build critical teacher-student bonds that can lead to a deeper understanding of the student, increased student motivation, and increased teaching effectiveness that incorporates and relate real-life experiences to reading instruction (Gay, 2002; NCCRESt, 2005; Patrikakou, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

A culturally and linguistically responsive RtI pedagogy also requires parental involvement. Engaged parents increase the likelihood that schools will be more diligent in the logistics underlying RtI and carrying out appropriate implementation. When parents experience opportunities to play a key role in the decision-making process, school-parent partnerships are cultivated and parents are more likely to buy-in to school policies and initiatives (Davis, 2000; Haines, McCart, & Turnbull, 2013). Teacher participation in the decision-making process is also critical to RtI buy-in and subsequent success. A 3-year longitudinal study by Turnbull (2002) involving 25 elementary schools and 5 middle schools across three school districts, sought to understand factors that impacted teacher buy-in in relation to quality of the chosen model, teachers' likelihood to improve their teaching, degree of personal motivation, and understanding

of how student learning would increase. The predictor variables were: (a) school level support (e.g., school infrastructure); (b) developer support (e.g., mentoring or coaching); (c) administrator buy-in; (d) training, resources; (e) control over the school initiative's impact in their classrooms; and (f) budget considerations. Nearly all factors, except budget considerations, were significant in creating teacher buy-in. The results of Turnbull's study have several pedagogical implications for RtI and CLD students in relation to school initiatives. First, teachers are more likely to support a school reform initiative when they are involved in decision-making and when their questions and concerns about implementation are addressed. Secondly, teachers are empowered and inclined to believe the school reform initiative will be successful if administrators believe in and support its success. Third, when teachers receive training, have access to needed resources, and maintain some decision-making power over classroom decisions, they are more likely to be effective teachers. Finally, administrators need to allow time for pre-planning and planning to occur before a school-wide initiative is launched.

### Final Thoughts

Successful implementation of a culturally and linguistically responsive response to RtI requires teachers to have knowledge of and be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic needs of CLD students. It also requires teachers to have knowledge of evidenced-based practices, students' cultural norms, and the communities in which students live. Teacher proficiency in delivering a culturally and linguistically responsive response to RtI not only helps CLD students succeed academically but also helps them cultivate positive relationships with teachers. Partnering with parents is essential to student success in that parents can help reinforce student learning and the lessons taught at school. Also critical to the success of a culturally and linguistically responsive response to RtI is teacher and administrator buy-in, teacher participation in the decision-making process, and teacher training and ongoing participation in professional development activities.

### AUTHOR NOTES

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