

## CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND SPECIAL EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF ONE MOTHER'S EXPERIENCES

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*Special education services have seen great improvement since the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, but culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families still face exceptional challenges when advocating for special education services for their children (Artiles & Harry, 2006; Palawat & May, 2011). Beyond language barriers, school culture and the special education system are often challenging to navigate, and cultural misunderstandings may lead to over-representation or the provision of services that fail to meet children's needs (Artiles & Harry, 2006; Palawat & May, 2011). This study investigates the case of one such family across several school districts and early intervention settings to identify areas of success and shortfalls, in order to contribute to research on critical needs for further improvements in special education relationships and services for CLD families.*

### **Introduction**

Although the U.S. has made great strides in providing special education services to students with learning differences, non-native speakers of English face particular challenges when advocating for their children's special education services (e.g. Blue Banning et al., 2004; Summers, 2005). Yet while children who are English Language Learners (ELLs) and students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) are over-represented in special education (e.g. Banks & Banks, 2007; Hardin, 2009), little work has been done to explore the experience of parents working to attain services for their children.

Based on our own experiences as native English speakers working in the education field, and as parents of children with special needs and IEPs, we know that navigating the special education system can pose challenges. These may be even more daunting for non-native speakers with no prior school experience or inside knowledge of how school systems operate. Due to the gap in research on special education services and CLD families, this study focuses on the experience of one family that has experienced multiple school environments and service providers in their quest to find the right *fit* for their son.

This case study provides an initial data set in order to answer the following research questions:

- How has this family experienced the special education process?
- What, in the parents' view, have the school districts done well?
- What have been greatest frustrations for these parents?
- What suggestions do they have for improvement?

Based on the case, we have developed a set of recommendations that policy makers should consider in developing more targeted interventions to support the needs of CLD families. While many families in the U.S. face challenges in obtaining adequate services for their children, the additional obstacles of language and cultural differences require support and mediation between home and school cultures.

Within the school culture, cooperation and collaboration are needed among specialists in language acquisition, special education, and general education so that appropriate interventions can be designed in conjunction with the input from CLD families.

#### *Review of Literature*

Since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children, the precursor to the subsequent Individuals with Disabilities in Education Acts (P.L. 94-142) in 1975, federal, state, and local education districts have made extensive efforts to enact educational policies and programs to meet the educational needs of individuals with learning differences (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Improvements have been hastened by research and practice in early identification and intervention, research-based programming, a focus on transitions and educational outcomes, and an emphasis on parent involvement as part of the Individual Educational Program (IEP) planning process. A key element has been a commitment to *culturally relevant instruction for diverse learners in inclusive environments* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 7). While research through the 1980s documented that culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs received *watered down instruction in segregated settings* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p.7), there has been a concerted effort to improve since then, with a focus on culturally relevant instruction and assessment that is validated and linked directly to curricula, including for students whose native language is not English. Improvements in this domain have mirrored efforts to close the persistent achievement gap for CLD students living in poverty, as illuminated by the reporting required by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Carey, 2014; Kim & Sunderman, 2005).

#### *CLD Parent Involvement in U.S. Education*

A great deal of research and advocacy has been devoted to the issue of increasing the involvement of CLD families in U.S. schools and overcoming the cultural differences which separate U.S. school culture from CLD families (e.g., Berman et al., 2000; Borman et al., 2000; Brooks et al., 2010; Bruner, 1996; Cummins, 2000; Erikson, 1996; Gebhart et al., 2002; Good et al., 2010). Historically, the teaching profession has been predominantly populated by teachers who are White and middle class (e.g., Goldring, Gray, Bitterman, & Broughman, 2013, p.3; Sleeter, 2001; p. 94), and as a result, there is a long history of cultural and linguistic misunderstandings that have created barriers to communication and collaboration between CLD families and U.S. schools (e.g., Berman et al., 2000; Brooks et al., 2010; Good et al., 2010). Lacking knowledge of other cultures, school administrators and teachers often attribute this lack of collaboration to indifference, low levels of education, and lack of support (Banks & Banks, 2007; Good et al., 2010; Mapp, 2003; Valenzuela, 2004). However, with the correct structures in place, CLD families welcome the opportunity to contribute to their children's education and to demonstrate their belief in the value of that education (Banks & Banks, 2007; Berman et al., 2000; Brooks et al., 2010; Good et al., 2010; Mapp, 2003). This is especially true when these children require services outside the mainstream classroom.

#### *CLD Students in Special Education*

Culturally and linguistically diverse students are overrepresented in special education in general (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Banks, & Banks, 2007; Gay, 2002; Harry, 2008; Skiba et al., 2008), and within special education settings in particular, CLD students are assigned to more restrictive environments than students who are White (McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2007, p. 12). Although the causes of this are not clear, and the trend is not monolithic across groups and categories, at least part of the problem can be attributed to cultural misunderstandings (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Banks & Banks, 2007; Harry, 2008; Meyer et al., 2007; Skiba et al., 2008).

For example, Hardin et al., (2009) posit that English language learners (ELLs) are overrepresented in special education due to the misunderstanding related to cultural differences, a lack of special education staff with linguistic and cultural skills, and communication challenges such as language barriers between parents and schools. In addition, assessment and interpretation of behaviors, appropriate service delivery, establishment of goals and outcomes, and other critical aspects of the special education process are often influenced negatively by dominant culture school administration (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Banks & Banks, 2007; Meyer et al., 2007). As a result, overlaps in the classification of English language learners (ELLs) and special education students *are frequent, systematically haphazard, and often deleterious* (p. 12), and special education placements that rely on professional judgment such as Emotionally Disturbed (ED) and Learning Disabled (LD) are disproportionately represented to a far greater extent than diagnosis-based categories (McDermott et al., 2007).

Although many districts are making strides in providing better services for students in need of both English services and special education, numerous barriers remain for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents of English language learners (ELLs) in the special education system. This is particularly true of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Harry, 2008; Hardin et al., 2009; Hart et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 2007).

#### *Obstacles for CLD Parent Participation in Special Education*

Pursuant to the principles in the IDEA and the guidelines adopted by the U.S. Department of Education, there is a commitment to enacting collaborative partnerships with families (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In terms of parent participation in the identification, eligibility, goal-setting and placement stages of the IEP process, involvement is legally mandated (Valenzuela, 2004). Nevertheless, it is often the case that very little interaction occurs during IEP meetings (Steeley, 2005; Valenzuela, 2004, p. 368). This is true for several reasons.

First, school officials may take a *deficit* view of CLD students and families, viewing their differences as deficiencies, rather than valuing their addition of linguistic and cultural capital to the school's diversity overall (Harry, 2008, p. 372; Valenzuela, 2004). Next, secretaries or other non-educational personnel are often pressed into the role of translator for IEP meetings. While likely well-intentioned, these individuals are not versed in special education language and nuance and can unwittingly undermine effective parent understanding and participation (Hart et al., 2012). Finally, there is a persistent assumption that CLD families are unconcerned about their children's education, or that they lack education themselves so are therefore incapable of contributing to a partnership (Banks & Banks, 2007; Meyer et al., 2007; Valenzuela, 2004). However, when the school makes efforts to ensure equitable participation across groups, CLD parents are engaged and invested in their interactions with schools (Mapp, 2003; Meyer et al., 2007; Valenzuela, 2004).

For example, in their work with 137 CLD families, Blue Banning et al., (2004) found that CLD families seek positive collaboration in the following ways: 1) positive and understandable and respectful communication; 2) a commitment to the child; 3) equal power in decision making; 4) competent implementation of goals; 5) mutual trust; 6) mutual respect (Blue Banning et al., 2004). Summers et al., (2005) used this research as the foundation for their *Family Professional Partnership Scale*, but given the difficulty of accessing this population, this has been used on a limited basis with CLD families (Harry, 2008).

In sum, effective practices for collaboration with CLD families involved in special education requires a foundation built upon trust between parents and professionals rather than *the more narrow framing of participation required by law, such as attendance at formal meetings and signatures at selected meetings arranged by professionals* (Meyer et al., 2007, p. 380). Such formal meetings are often characterized by technical discussion among professionals in language that can seem opaque and obfuscatory at best, and overwhelming and alienating at worst (Steeley, 2005).

#### *Purposes of Study*

Building on our experiences as K-12 practitioners and parents of children with IEPs, this study seeks to extend current understandings of CLD family experiences with special education by using some of the constructs identified in previous research (e.g., Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Summers et al., 2005) to examine one family's experiences with the provision of services for their CLD child.

We initially undertook this study to investigate explore the obstacles faced by CLD parents in general, but given that Ms. G's experiences were so compelling, we determined that our conversations with her merited a case study approach. Because she encountered, named, and sought to overcome a variety of difficulties throughout the early years of her son David's education, we believe that her story has the potential to inform policy makers and practitioners alike. In this way, we hope to contribute to broader understandings by schools and service agencies working with CLD families in need of services for their children.

#### **Methods**

##### *Participant Recruitment and Interview Techniques*

In order to recruit participants for this study, we developed a flier for distribution through local special education professionals, occupational and speech therapists, and other locally based professionals (see Appendix A). Respondents were invited to meet with us for semi-structured interviews based on the

Interview Protocols presented in Appendix B. Given the individual nature of experience, however, we used the protocols as a guide to ensure coverage, allowing participants to speak in a more open-ended way that reflected their priorities, experiences, opinions, and views of their children and the educational process. We attained written and verbal consent, guaranteed anonymity, and secure digital files under coded names to protect participant identity.

First, following up on our recorded interviews, we transcribed the sessions. Next, we reviewed transcripts to identify overall themes, and then analyzed the transcripts with both categorizing and connecting strategies in mind. We coded initially for emic or emergent themes and then applied etic codes based on the categories previously identified as best practices for school systems working with CLD families involved in special education services.

Resulting themes suggest numerous structural issues that may benefit school districts, parents, and special educators alike.

#### *Participant: Ms. G*

The subject of this interview is Ms. G, the mother of David, an 11-year old boy with Down syndrome and sensory processing issues. Ms. G is a native speaker of Spanish, and her husband is a native speaker of Tagalog. Both are fluent in English. The extended family includes speakers of both Tagalog and Spanish, and David has been consistently exposed to multilingualism throughout his life. Ms. G holds a graduate degree in the field of communications from a well-regarded university, and she works in a professional setting using this degree. In an extensive interview, Ms. G discussed her experiences dealing with three different educational settings: a private preschool, a medium-sized public school system in a relatively affluent suburban district, and a public urban charter school.

#### *Data Analysis and Validity*

Because Ms. G's experiences superseded the pre-existing etic framework based on a synthesis of research in this field (e.g., Blue-Banning et. Al., 2004; Summers, 2005) with which we began this project, we concluded that reporting findings based on the emic themes that emerged from Ms. G's responses was far greater in interpretive validity than any attempt to fit her responses into a pre-existing framework. As an additional strategy to enhance validity, we present examples from her responses wherever possible to illustrate her primary thematic points. Given that it is critical to avoid generalization and essentialist or reductionist approaches (Maxwell, 2012), we also undertook a search for discrepant data within each thematic area and each of the school settings.

#### *Findings*

In the discussion of her experiences, Ms. G explained the diagnosis and early intervention efforts for David, her struggles to ensure a bilingual education for him, and her interactions with educators and administrators in the three school settings. In addition, she talked about her larger efforts to engage in self-education and community relations in order to ensure the best possible educational experience for David.

#### *Overview: Experiences in Education*

Since David's diagnosis shortly after his birth in 2003, Ms. G has been engaged in seeking and managing services for him. In the beginning, she initiated early intervention, and he received services, including speech therapy, at home. Later, she enrolled him in a private preschool that had expressed willingness and the ability to accommodate his need, and for kindergarten, she sent him to the local public school. Her ongoing search for alternatives ultimately led her to try a newly formed charter school in a different school district. Table 1 summarizes Ms. G's school setting experiences; primary themes that emerged from her description are presented in the sections which follow.

Ms. G's experiences with David's education began with the Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECI) provided by the county in which she lived. These services began shortly after birth and continued through elementary school and included both in-home and preschool interventions such as occupational, speech/language, and physical therapies. Her level of satisfaction varied based on the provider; she found interaction with the first speech therapist (detailed below) troubling, but subsequent interventions were more appropriate. During that time, Ms. G also enrolled David in a private preschool (PPS). Although the PPS had verified their preparation to meet the needs of a student with Down's Syndrome, Ms. G felt that David was marginalized and had a sub-par experience. When David reached school age, Ms. G enrolled him in kindergarten with her public school district in a neighborhood elementary school

(NES); while there, he divided his time between mainstream and special education classrooms. Finally, after dissatisfaction with the NES, Ms. G found an alternative, requiring her family to move to a new school district so that David could enroll in a charter school (CES) with a focus on students with exceptionalities and learning differences. The family's experiences in each setting are further detailed in subsequent sections, but several themes persist throughout: the *English only* outlook, the search for like-minded others, the *us versus them* mentality, and the need to be one's own proponent for appropriate services.

**Table 1. School Settings**

Educational setting	Abbreviation	Description of education	Age	Grades
Early intervention	ECI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>County provided; Diagnosis-based.</li> <li>In home</li> </ul>	3 months-5/6 years	Pre-K
Private Preschool	PPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Admissions-based</li> <li>Mainstream classroom</li> </ul>	3-4 years (check)	Pre-K
Neighborhood Elementary School	NES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local school district-provided</li> <li>Mainstream and special education classrooms</li> </ul>	6-9 (confirm)	K-2 (partially)
Charter School	Elementary CES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start up charter in a new district</li> </ul>	10 (currently)	2 (partial) (TBC)

#### *Bilingualism vs. English Only*

The issue of bi-/multilingualism arose very early for Ms. G in the context of early intervention. As she explained, from the time David was a baby, she had spoken to him only in Spanish (her first language) during the day; when her husband returned in the evenings, he spoke to David in English. While his father's first language is Tagalog, and their son heard and was aware of Tagalog through interactions with his paternal grandparents, Mr. G felt that English was far more useful. Ms. G noted that although David was language delayed, he had numerous sight words by age three and could respond to signing in Spanish or English.

The first speech therapist with whom the G family worked, however, encouraged the family to drop the use of Spanish, from the time that David was 1 year old. They resisted.

*You know, I said I don't think that it's appropriate for my son. And from everything that I've read, for him to be included in his family, he has to be able to communicate with everybody.*

It was this process that started her own process of research and education into the field of Down syndrome education. As a result, Ms. G decided to undertake her own investigation to see if research would support her position.

Ms. G felt confident that bilingualism would not be a problem for David based on his early experiences with Spanish and English, along with exposure to Tagalog. Moreover, she also believed that supporting his bilingualism was essential for his identity in the family. Nevertheless, the issue was not resolved with the first speech therapist.

When David entered the public school system, he started out in a self-contained special education program; Ms. G asked for David to be mainstreamed and included into the bilingual classroom. She said David and the teacher in that classroom responded positively:

*He loved it, and the teacher there was very dedicated, and she really liked him, and it was a personality thing. So, she was very happy to have him in her classroom and she actually was teaching him to read in Spanish, which was easier for him than trying to read in English. He caught on faster in Spanish than in English. So, we wanted to continue that...*

At the end of the year, however, the school would not allow David to continue in the program.

Ultimately, when Ms. G left that school district in favor of another district's charter school, which she had undertaken extensive efforts to find, she found the linguistic – as well as service – answer to her quest. The new school took into consideration the fact that David was bilingual, and actually used his bilingualism as a tool to reach out to him and further his instruction.

#### *Community vs. Isolation*

Transitioning from early intervention services, where providers visited her home and provided extensive information in the preschool setting, to the larger and more ritualized environment of the local elementary school proved to be a shock. Ms. G felt isolated on numerous levels.

First, she felt that her son was excluded from the larger school community. Special education students had separate entrances and morning procedures from the broader school community. In terms of relationships within the school community, both among parents and between parents and the school, Ms. G encountered a dramatic shift toward isolation, unable, for *confidentiality reasons* to contact or communicate with other parents in his class unless she encountered them randomly around the school.

In terms of participating in her son's education and school life, she was suddenly shut out and unwelcome in the classroom of the second kindergarten placement, following her son's exit from the bilingual program. Finally, the lack of information, both from teachers and service providers, was seemingly the most difficult issue she faced.

*And I found – I found that to be – this is my child and I wanna know what's going on in the classroom. I found that that lack of communication or not even being forthright about – how can you not have a set schedule? That seems kinda ridiculous to me. You know? It was all a mess.*

#### *Distrust of the System*

In spite of the difficulties with the first speech therapist, Ms. G had a positive overall experience with early intervention with a *pretty good team and ... a very good case manager*.

*I think during early intervention, after I got rid of his speech therapist and I got a new speech therapist who was incredibly supportive, she turned out to be quite a champion, as well as my caseworker. My case manager and my speech therapist were – went to school and really battled for his rights, particularly in the preschool setting. So, I had a wonderful relationship with them.*

Yet many other experiences fostered distrust, both in the private preschool setting (PPS) and then in the neighborhood school district (NES). When she enrolled her son in a highly regarded PPS, she found that he seemed to regress and reversed many of the gains he had been experiencing at home, he had enormous difficulties adjusting to the classroom, and the school was really not able to make appropriate accommodations for a child with Down's Syndrome.

*It was an Early Enrichment Center and it wasn't an inclusive setting, per se, but we had talked ahead of time with the director.... Then, when he was in the classroom, he was blamed for a lot of things. Well, he can't walk yet. Why can't he walk yet? I'm like, Did I fail to tell you he has Down syndrome?... and he went from being a kid who could read sight words, three-letter sight words, and be able to identify colors to just completely just – he regressed so deeply that he didn't want anything to do with school.*

Because the NES had continued to provide preschool and early intervention services through kindergarten, Ms. G had positive relations with the local school district when her son enrolled. It was during the transition to kindergarten when IEP issues became problematic. Although her very early experience with the school was positive, she characterizes the period overall as one of difficulty.

*But it was really when I crossed into kindergarten after three when things became more difficult and the IEP process was always embattled, you know? It was always a*

*difficult process. And I'd have to say it continued to be a difficult process up through first or second grade, the worst being kindergarten. We did kindergarten twice.*

Initially, she felt that the school was very responsive, respecting her request that he be mainstreamed, and offering the bilingual kindergarten option, which supported his home language needs. As noted above, Ms. G was pleased that the school offered the bilingual program and appreciated the efforts of the teacher.

After her son was pulled from the class, however, her relations with the school deteriorated. First, because the decision to take her son out of the class was based on the special education teachers' needs rather than her son's needs, she felt that the school was trying to fit him into the services that they offered rather than tailoring those services to meet her son's needs. Moreover, she felt as though the same pattern were true in his daily routines and services:

*....I don't think he was treated with dignity at all and that was part of the problem with that setting .....I think there was an idea that, because he had the diagnosis of Down syndrome, there was some prescribed steps or limitations to what he should be doing and where he would be. I think that that never left us.*

Another struggle Ms. G had with the school was in obtaining appropriate accommodations for her son's sensory regulation needs. She had requested an occupational therapy (OT) evaluation and the school determined that there were no needs; she then returned to her private provider who sent her to a major diagnostic center for a full OT evaluation. They found significant sensory processing issues.

*The OT in the Center said he needs 15-minute breaks every hour. You know? And that's – and his – and the way that his day was set up was absolutely contrary to anything that would have worked with him at all. He couldn't possibly be successful in that setting.*

Perhaps most significantly, before the IEP meeting that would determine his first grade placement, the new teacher told her that the son's kindergarten program would last two years. Ms. G approached the director of special education about the matter, and he told her that in fact that was not the case. As a result she invited the director to her next IEP meeting, when her son's placement would be discussed, but upon arrival, she realized that the placement had already been decided:

*When we reconvened for the next IEP, you come in, and all the coffee cups had been – you know, you could tell by the coffee cups. There was lipstick and they were halfway done –So, they'd had the meeting before the meeting and they'd decided that they were gonna retain him another year because that's just what they did. And so, because the special ed director wasn't there, the meeting completely changed from, He's moving on to 1st grade with these supports, to, No, we need to retain him another year because it's not appropriate for him to move on.*

As Ms. G recounted, her final battle with the school system was over her son's academic progress, particularly in reading.

*They gave me what was a checklist and the checklist basically said, He won't answer questions; just put him at the lowest level. And I said, This isn't a – this isn't a report. This isn't even an assessment. Basically, I was told again at my IEP meeting, Well, your expectations need to be readjusted. Maybe what you need to accept is the fact that he's not going to read at the same level as anyone else or maybe he may not read at all.*

#### *Parent self-education and advocacy*

From the beginning, Ms. G had a strong sense of knowing what was right for her son, of viewing him within the socio-cultural context of his family, and of expecting positive outcomes and growth in his academic progress. Thus, when she encountered low expectations, views that ran counter to David's bilingual/multilingual context, or approaches that were system-based rather than student-centered, she took the steps she needed to inform and equip herself with information and resources to advocate effectively for her son.

The first instance came during the early intervention that was the result of post-birth diagnosis, as noted above, when she researched the option of bilingualism for children with Down's Syndrome. As she proceeded through the early years of working with the local school system, she continued her research in order to bring relevant information to IEP meetings.

*You know, I did a lot of research, and I was always bringing something to the table, and I never felt like I could go to an IEP without bringing something to the table, whether it be practice that someone else was doing because I did do research; I read the stuff on the CEC [Council for Exceptional Children website] you know?*

Because of her interest and research in the district and in the special education process, Ms. G eventually gained a position in the district's parent resource center (PRC), a source for educating parents of children with special needs and IEPs. From this vantage point, she gained a firsthand look at the special education processes in the district, learned more about the school system, and advised other parents extensively. She also uncovered information that she found troubling regarding the IEP process.

*It was when I was working at the PRC. I had access to the IEP online, and I would read an IEP, and I said, Wait. This [IEP] is [for] Johnny, but yet it says, 'Suzie'. You know? If I go to Suzie's IEP, it says the same thing. And it was very disconcerting that there was – and, I mean, I understand people are busy, and I understand that you wanna take shortcuts, and if things have worked with one child, it could possibly work with another child, but being a parent, you really want to know that your IEP is individualized.*

For her, this confirmed her own experiences that the special education services in the district were system-centered rather than student-centered. Part of her learning in the PRC led her to access district statistics, at which point she decided to actively seek alternative placements in surrounding districts. At this point, David was selected for a spot in a special-education oriented charter school in a nearby district that involved a housing change, but has proven, in Ms. G's estimation, well worth the effort.

#### *Resolution: A Responsive School*

After extensive research, Ms. G's son was admitted to a newly opened public charter school in a neighboring district. The director founded the school to serve children with special needs after discovering a dearth of responsive services for children with learning challenges and differences.

*I think the biggest success is the fact that this school was designed to be an inclusive setting. It was – everything about this school was designed to be flexible enough to give every child their own opportunity. I don't think that the public school setting is designed to do that. I don't think the public school setting is flexible enough. I think you're trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.*

Although the school experienced some start up issues, Ms. G has been very happy with their communication, inclusiveness, level of attention, and accommodations. *For example*, unlike the local school district where her son began his education, the charter school acknowledged his sensory needs from the outset, he was much more regulated throughout the school day, and, she felt, he was treated with dignity. In addition, he even began to develop friendships.

When he entered the school, he was evaluated and discovered to be two years behind, but since starting the new school, he made rapid progress. Finally, the new school has taken into consideration the larger family values and identity and is encouraging her son's bilingualism, a fact which seems to make both Ms. G and her son very happy.

*So, all of that has contributed to him being more successful and they've also taken into consideration the fact that he's bilingual.. So, it was a perfect fit, you know*

#### **Conclusions and Implications**

Generalization from a particular case study is, of course, impossible. Nevertheless, in presenting the story of Ms. G, we felt that her experiences were compelling to merit a broader reading. The themes of the importance of recognizing the legitimate needs of bilingual families, sharing information with

parents, ensuring dignified treatment of children with learning differences, and creating an environment in which each student can flourish are important ones in informing the processes by which school districts interact with culturally and linguistically diverse families whose children have learning challenges or differences.

**Table 2. Summary Recommendations for Services to CLD Students and Families**

<b>Six Themes of Collaborative Family-Professional Partnership With Related Indicators</b> (Blue-Banning, 2004, Table 1, p. 174)	<b>Recommendations based on this Case Study</b>
<p><b>Theme</b></p> <p><b>Communication:</b> The quality of communication is positive, understandable, and respectful among all members at all levels of the partnership. The quality of communication is also at a level to enable efficient and effective coordination and understanding among all members. Being open Listening Communicating frequently Coordinating information</p>	<p><b>Indicators</b></p> <p>Sharing resources Being clear Being honest Communicating positively Being tactful</p>
<p><b>Commitment:</b> The members of the partnership share a sense of assurance about a) each other's devotion and loyalty to the child and family, and b) each other's belief in the importance of the goals being pursued on behalf of the child and family. Being accessible to the child and family Being consistent Being sensitive to emotions</p>	<p>Demonstrating commitment Being flexible Regarding work as "more than a job" Regarding child and family as "more than a case" Encouraging the child and family</p>
<p><b>Equality:</b> The members of the partnership feel a sense of equity in decision making and service implementation, and actively work to ensure that all other members of the partnership feel equally powerful in their ability to influence outcomes for children and families  Fostering harmony among all partners Coming to the table/avoiding "turfism" Acting "equal"</p>	<p>Avoiding use of "clout" Empowering partners Validating others Advocating for child or family with other professionals Being willing to explore all options</p>
<p><b>Skills:</b> Members of the partnership perceive that others on the team demonstrate competence, including service providers' ability to fulfill their roles and to demonstrate "recommended practice" approaches to working with children and families. Considering the whole child or family Being willing to learn</p>	<p>Taking action Having expectations for child's progress Meeting individual special needs</p>
<p><b>Trust:</b> The members of the partnership share a sense of assurance about the reliability or dependability of the character, ability, strength, or truth of the other members of the partnership. Being discreet</p>	<p>Being reliable Keeping the child safe</p>
<p><b>Respect:</b> The members of the partnership regard each other with esteem and demonstrate that esteem through actions and communications. Exercising nondiscrimination Avoiding intrusion</p>	<p>Valuing the child Being nonjudgmental Being courteous</p>

As noted, Ms. G is not representative of the typical parent in her level of research, her determination to ensure the best possible learning conditions for her child, her ability to work within the system to advocate for herself and other parents, and her access to resources enabling her to move to a new district when she discovered a much better learning environment for her son. Despite the fact that Ms. G's level of empowerment is not typical, her experiences demonstrate the need for improved school outreach to

parents who are not aware of the channels they can pursue to obtain information on their rights and access to services.

Even with her level of information and research and preparation, Ms. G was often marginalized by the formal special education system. While this can be the case for English speaking parents, the risks are all the greater for immigrant families who face language and cultural barriers, in addition to the official barriers of school expertise presented in a manner that is less-than-accessible to parents.

Unfortunately, U.S. schools have a legacy of marginalizing immigrant populations in schools; overcoming this in the crucial context of special education is critical to delivering well-targeted, student services is critical to enabling students to achieve their potential through the educational process.

Ms. G's primary point – that the first district sought to fit her son into existing systems and expectations that did not suit him – is most likely the consequence of districts struggling to comply with the law requiring appropriate accommodations and least restrictive environment for children covered by the IDEA. Many parents will not have the knowledge or means to consider other schools or the technical and cultural wherewithal to challenge pre-existing notions regarding bilingual education and services supporting students with learning differences.

Given the preponderance of CLD students in general, and ELLs in particular, in the special education system (e.g. Banks & Banks, 2007), development of more effective partnerships with CLD families is essential to improving services. Table 2 summarizes our list of recommended measures, which go beyond the framework provided by Blue-Banning et al.,(2004).

Policy-makers should establish guidelines based on best practices for including CLD parents in the special education and IEP process. This could include among other measures professional translators and advocates – ideally representing CLD communities – to assist in meetings. This assistance should not be merely linguistic, but also cultural, so that parents understand the implications of decisions related to school services. In addition, resources for parents should be available in multiple languages, with multilingual outreach targeting the non-English speaking community of parents in a particular district. While this may, in the short run, require additional resources, the benefit to society of producing more capable and independent individuals is significant.

There is a need for future research to develop broader understandings of the needs of CLD families (Pugach, 2001, cited in Blue Banning et al., 2004), and our research with CLD families is ongoing to contribute to this foundation. Ms. G's experience shows that there are gaps in service provision aligned with what research has identified as best practice (Summers et al, 2003; Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Navigating the special education system can be difficult for anyone, but for CLD families, given the cultural and linguistic boundaries that may persist in some settings, doing so may pose even greater challenges. It is our hope that identifying these challenges in light of best practices and legal norms will begin to call attention to the need to improve special education services for all students through effective engagement with their families.

While this case study examines the situation in a U.S. context – in relatively well-funded and high-performing districts – the issues are relevant to a wider international context. International migration issues, within regions and across regional borders includes refugees with even more specific needs as well as economic and political immigrant groups who face similar language and cultural challenges in new countries with disparate linguistic and cultural and regulatory parameters. Meeting the needs of all students is a human rights issue, and is also in the self-interest of host countries so that students can achieve their full potential and thus make a stronger contribution to national and international economy and civic life. Our research continues in order to further identify preeminent issues that can lead to the evolution of policy and effective interventions.

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