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# The Development of the Bilingual Special Education Field: Major Issues, Accomplishments, Future Directions, and Recommendations

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# The Development of the Bilingual Special Education Field: Major Issues, Accomplishments, Future Directions, and Recommendations

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In this paper, we review various challenges in regard to educating children with and without disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. The challenges discussed include (1) biased assessment that results in mis- or overrepresenting CLD students in special education, (2) difficulty distinguishing between disability and differences, and (3) lack of competent bilingual special educators. As recommended practices, we propose to use the response to intervention model in identifying and instructing CLD children with and without disabilities. We point out that future research should examine how collaborative service delivery models contribute to referrals of CLD children into special education and the instruction of these children. Future research should also focus on how to expand teachers' knowledge about both the sociocultural and learning contexts to aid in producing positive outcomes for CLD children both with and without disabilities.

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The field of bilingual special education is a relatively young field that began in the early 1970s. The significant catalysts in the emergence of bilingual special education were two federal legislations: P. L. 94-142 and P. L. 90-247 along with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Lau v. Nichols*. As categorized by Baca and Cervantes (1989), the development of this field can be divided into three periods: (1) The awareness phase from 1970 to 1975, (2) the program development phase from 1975 to 1985, and (3) the program refinement and institutionalization phase from 1985 to 1989. The first phase seemed to focus on raising the awareness and issues and on calling attention to the need for the field. The second period witnessed the development of initial research programs with an emphasis on nonbiased assessment. During the latter part of the second period, the provision of appropriate bilingual services to students with limited English proficiency and with disabilities began. During the third period, bilingual special education teacher training received considerable attention.

In this paper, we focus on the needs of English language learners (ELLs) who are learning English as a second language. They are a part of a student population from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. The initial purpose of the development of bilingual special education was aimed to address the needs of ELLs with disabilities. However, this

program inadvertently may have been used as a dumping ground for many ELLs. Professionals were not familiar with or did not know how to work with the ELL students. This also happened to many other children who were misplaced in special education. Although bilingual special education seems to be the interface between bilingual education and special education, simply combining these two fields is not adequate and cannot address the complexity of this field (Collier, 1989). Many issues cut across different disciplines such as English as a second language (ESL), psychology, special education, bilingual education, literacy education, etc. As this field continues to evolve, many old and new controversial issues and challenges still confront educators, related service professionals, researchers, and policy makers.

In this review, we will discuss several challenges and accomplishments regarding the education of ELLs. To forge further development of the field, we propose future endeavors and directions for practice, professional development, and research. The major issues discussed about the education of ELLs include the achievement gap, the underachievement of certain CLD students in schools and school failure, and the overrepresentation of certain CLD students in special education, especially in high-incidence disabilities. While most of the literature focuses on overrepresentation, a small portion of the literature sheds light on underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted education. In addition, the current literature seems to focus on an elementary student population with little attention to young children and secondary students from CLD backgrounds and their families.

In the final section we propose some suggestions for the improvement of services to CLD students in the areas of assessment, disability versus difference, and teacher competencies. In addition, we highlight innovative efforts in the field including culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, service delivery models, such as response to intervention, early intervention and prevention, and research.

## **Issues and Challenges**

### **Assessment**

Assessment, in education, refers to collecting data on students through formal and informal tests, interviews, and observations. Assessment serves various purposes, including screening, diagnosis, progress monitoring, and outcome measuring. That is, assessment is used to identify students who may have academic and social/behavioral issues, to determine educational placements, and to monitor progress towards behavior and academic goals. To accomplish these purposes, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 stipulates that assessment instruments and methods used with CLD students must be nonbiased and nondiscriminatory. Schools that have received federal, state, and local funding must provide and administer assessments in the student's native language as well as assess for cultural and linguistic backgrounds that could impact the performance of students (López, 2003). Federal

regulations further require that schools gather evidence on and monitor the progress of these students.

Assessment has been an essential educational practice; however, there have been numerous issues regarding assessing students that are often complex with no simple solutions (Thurlow, Nelson, Teelucksingh, & Draper, 2001). School professionals have frequently been blamed for being biased. Such bias results in misidentification and overrepresentation of CLD students in special education. Using data from Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten, Cohort, Samson and Lesaux (2009) offered a revealing finding on the issue of teacher bias. CLD students were underrepresented in special education in kindergarten and first grade, but they began to be overrepresented in third grade across all disability categories. They further reported regression analysis that indicated that teacher ratings of language and literacy skills, and reading proficiency were the two significant predictors of placement in special education. This finding illustrates the prominence of language-based skills in the identification process. It also suggests how teachers might contribute to the identification process of special education for CLD students.

It is common knowledge among researchers and practitioners that African-American students have been disproportionately diagnosed with intellectual disability or emotional/behavior disorder as have Native Americans with learning disabilities. Although it is unclear exactly what shapes the overrepresentation of certain racial groups and specific placement patterns, the use of inappropriate assessment in special education eligibility determination is largely responsible for it. For example, the majority of the standardized testing materials are developed in English based on White Anglo cultural practices without taking into consideration various cultural and linguistic differences. When these tests are given to students whose primary language is other than English, the results of those tests will create significant biases against ELLs. García and Pearson (1994) described at least three potential biases that standardized tests can have for ELLs in the following paragraph:

[1] a norming bias (small numbers of particular minorities included in probability samples, increasing the likelihood their minority group samples are unrepresentative), [2] content bias (test content and procedures reflecting the dominant culture's standards of language function and shared knowledge and behavior), and [3] linguistic and cultural biases (factors that adversely affect the formal test performance of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, including timed testing, difficulty with English vocabulary, and the near impossibility of determining what bilingual students know in their two languages) (p. 343–349).

The Diana versus State of Board of Education (1970) case in California was one in which the use of formal tests to place students in special education was challenged. Diana, a Spanish-speaking student was diagnosed with mental retardation due to her low score on an IQ test given to her in English and consequently placed in a class for students with mental retardation. The

court ruled that Spanish-speaking children should be given a test in their native language and schools are required to use nonverbal tests and other extensive data necessary to justify special education placement. This was the first court case that admitted that formal tests can be biased against ELLs. For approximately four decades since the *Diana versus State of Board of Education* case, the use of inappropriate assessment materials has continued. This issue has been well acknowledged in several recent nation-wide surveys in that speech and language pathologists reported the needs for nonbiased assessment methods and materials for use with CLD students (Kritikos, 2003; Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005).

The way that tests are administered can also contribute to overrepresentation of CLD students in special education. Schools, particularly those in urban settings, are often understaffed and lack qualified professionals to conduct assessments. Consequently, they handle more assessments than they are supposed to and make placement decisions without sufficient information gathering (Harry & Klingner, 2007). When a student speaks a primary language other than English or is from a diverse cultural background, the assessment procedures become more complex and require more time. Although interviews or observations are excellent ways to obtain culturally specific insights about the student being assessed, urban professionals do not fully take advantage of these data collection methods because of lack of resources such as time and trained professionals. Furthermore, the majority of testing in schools is administered by monolingual English-speaking professionals. Roseberry-McKibbin and Eicholtz (1994) stated that the number of CLD students has significantly increased, but the number of bilingual/bicultural professionals has not appreciably increased over the last several decades. For example, New York State Intensive Teacher Institute reported that the state's personnel shortage in bilingual special education for the 2006-2007 academic year was approximately 20% (Intensive Teacher Institute, 2009). Furthermore, a recent nation-wide survey found that only 37% of special educators had any formal training in second-language acquisition (Mueller, Singer, & Carranza, 2006). No study thus far examines the extent to which general educators and other related professionals had formal training of this kind. Providing intense training to more English-speaking professionals in second-language acquisition and cultural differences of ELLs may be one effective way to decrease overrepresentation of CLD students in special education. The more understanding of linguistic and cultural differences professionals develop, the more they will practice culturally and linguistically responsive assessments.

Compared to low-incidence disabilities, overidentification of CLD students occurs more in high-incidence disabilities. Researchers in the field strongly agree that identifying high-incidence disabilities is a subjective and ambiguous process because definitions of these disabilities are vague and controversial (MacSwan, Rolstad, & Glass, 2002; Valencia & Suzuki, 2001). This subjective disability identification process, with the historical devaluation of CLD groups in the U.S. educational system has strongly influenced special education placements (Harry & Klingner, 2007).

In reducing biases from standardized assessments, many alternative assessments have been proposed to either replace or supplement standardized assessments. The response to intervention (RTI) model is an alternative assessment and instructional/intervention approach to be used with ELLs, which will be described in depth later in this article. Throughout the RTI process, ongoing screening and assessment is provided to identify and prevent risk factors and learning and behavioral problems. Although RTI has been perceived as a promising approach, little is known about whether or not RTI can positively reduce the disproportional representation of CLD students in special education. In using RTI model, it is worth keeping in mind a wise caution provided by Klingner, Artiles, and Barletta (2006) that CLD students' opportunities to learn may be compromised and they may still be overrepresented in special education, unless evidence-based interventions that take into consideration appropriate assessments and interventions specifically for CLD students are employed.

### **Disability and differences**

Historically, a common disability with which CLD students have been diagnosed is a language-related disorder (Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005). The fact that a student does not use Standard English in school does not mean that he or she has a language disorder. Therefore, a student who can effectively communicate in his or her primary language should not be considered as having a language disorder. Professionals, including bilingual speech and language pathologists, often report difficulty distinguishing language differences from language disorders in ELLs (Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005). In the last two decades, attention was given to refining the understanding of professionals about language differences and disorders. For example, a useful principle for the distinction between the two is to assess the extent to which the student can communicate with his or her peers in either the primary language or English. While care must be taken not to mistake a cultural and language difference for a disorder, disorders that exist in the context of a language and cultural difference must not be overlooked (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009). In the 1990s, some guidelines were drafted to determine whether or not a CLD student may have a language-related disability (Roseberry-McKibbin, 1995, p. 14):

- Can not express basic needs.
- Can give appropriate responses during conversation or to questions.
- Does not stay on task.
- Has a word-find problem (skills differ from peers who are ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages]).
- Has difficulty taking turns during conversations or class discussions, such as interrupting or failing to contribute.
- Inappropriately continues on a topic after conversation or discussion has moved on.
- Does not ask or answer questions appropriately (skills differ from peers who are ESOL).
- Avoids verbal exchanges with peers and teachers.

- Responds nonverbally (or uses gestures) when a spoken response is appropriate.
- Is not understood by peers.
- Requires many repetitions of conversations, questions, or directions.
- Frequently repeats what is heard.

When a CLD student exhibits many of these behaviors, the student can be suspected of having a language-related disability, thus he or she should be referred for further evaluation using informal and formal assessments (Roseberry-McKibbin, 1995).

### **Bilingual special education teacher competencies**

Scholarly literature has indicated that having a highly qualified teacher can greatly contribute to a student's success. In many instances, we have anecdotal records reporting the teacher's contribution to the success of ELLs. However, there is minimal or no empirical research documenting and validating this. More evidence-based research is greatly needed in documenting teacher competencies and effectiveness with ELLs. Currently, the teaching force does not appear to reflect the diversity of the demographics, nor are teachers well prepared to work with ELLs with and without disabilities (García & Guerra, 2004; García & Ortiz, 2006).

Since the early 1980s, the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education has funded personnel training programs for preparing bilingual special education teachers, and a few researchers began to outline competencies required of bilingual special education teachers (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Collier, 1989). Collier pointed out that the interface approach of bilingual- and special education fields was not sufficient. Training for bilingual special educators requires carefully articulated and planned integration of these two and other related fields in order to result in an innovative and unique knowledge base for bilingual special education. Baca and Amato (1989) described these competencies as follows:

1. The desire to work with the culturally and linguistically different exceptional child.
2. The ability to work effectively with parents of these students.
3. The ability to develop appropriate individual educational plans (IEPs) for these students.
4. Knowledge and sensitivity toward the language and the culture of the group to be served.
5. The ability to teach English as a second language to the students.
6. The ability to conduct nonbiased assessment with culturally and linguistically different exceptional students.
7. The ability to use appropriate methods and materials when working with these students (p. 169).

After three decades, it seems that the field is still short-staffed of bilingual special educators both at the pre-service and in-service levels (Artiles & Klingner, 2006; Ortiz, 2002). In addition, professional development of in-service bilingual special educators alone will not contribute to system-wide change to respond to the needs of ELLs with and without special

needs (García & Guerra, 2004; García & Ortiz, 2006). Several researchers pointed out that effective training for educators working with ELLs requires cultural self-awareness, attitudes/expectations, beliefs, knowledge, and skills, including an increased understanding of sociocultural influences on teaching and learning, as well as the sociopolitical contexts of education (García & Guerra, 2004; García & Ortiz, 2006; Lynch & Hanson, 1998). Given the emphasis on shared responsibility for all students, school-wide professional development should strive for culturally and linguistically responsive and competent practice. Building upon the previous literature, García and Ortiz (2006) have suggested that the following topics and competencies be emphasized in professional development for educators:

- Cultural influences on children's socialization at home and at school.
- First and second language acquisition and dialectal differences.
- Instructional strategies that promote proficiency in first and second languages/dialects.
- Characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy.
- Culturally responsive curricula for literacy development, academic content, and social skills.
- Culturally-responsive classroom and behavior management strategies.
- Informal assessment strategies to monitor student progress.
- Building positive relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse families and communities. (p. 66)

The competencies outlined above do not include competencies required for educators to work with ELLs with special needs. What must be included are topics and competencies such as (a) the view of diversity and disability, (b) interplay between disability and poverty, (c) instructional and assessment practices for CLD students with special needs, and (d) the ability to interpret various assessment data for making instructional, interventional, and eligibility decisions (Artiles & Klingner, 2006; Ortiz, 2002). These competencies are important for educators to support ELLs with academic difficulties or disabilities. The convergence of findings indicates that in order to serve ELLs with academic difficulties and/or with disabilities, they all need culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, response to intervention, and effective early intervention strategies.

### **Service delivery models**

As mentioned elsewhere, culturally and linguistically responsive practice, the newly proposed service-delivery model called response to intervention (RTI), and effective early prevention and intervention have the potential to address the challenges facing the education of ELLs with and without disabilities. However, this could only take place if these models/approaches are implemented effectively, collaboratively, and systematically. ESL teachers, bilingual teachers, school psychologists, and special education teachers need to collaboratively implement these models to the best interests of ELLs.

*Culturally and linguistically responsive instruction.* Researchers have identified the importance of cultural and linguistic responsiveness in the teaching and learning process (Cummins, 1986; Ortiz, 2002; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). In other words, educators must ensure that students' sociocultural, linguistic, racial, ethnic, and other relevant backgrounds are addressed when identifying reasons for academic difficulty or failure, designing interventions, monitoring student performance, and interpreting assessment results. They also pointed out that these elements need to be in place when designing culturally and linguistically responsive service delivery models.

First, educators and other related service personnel believe in and create a positive school culture in which all students can learn and be successful. This means that they need to have high expectations for all students. For ELLs with and without disabilities, an additive view of culture and language, and a focus on designing and providing inclusive learning environments that help them develop bilingual/bicultural competence is critical (Cummins, 1986). Second, curricula and instruction need to consider and build on students' prior sociocultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences (i.e., their strengths and available resources). Classroom instruction should be comprehensible for the sociocultural relevance and language and content through the use of thematic instruction, guided participation (Rogoff, 1990), and instructional mediation using a variety of scaffolding techniques (García & Ortiz, 2006; Santamaria, Fletcher, & Bos, 2002). Third, these programs are academically rich and challenging (i.e., focus on higher order thinking and problem-solving in addition to basic skills). Students are provided with high-quality instruction by highly qualified educators and related service personnel (García & Ortiz, 2006). Lastly, parents/family members are seen as valuable resources instead of problems or barriers, and as partners in supporting and promoting academic progress (García, Wilkinson, & Ortiz, 1995). Teachers work closely with parents and other family members to form a posture of cultural reciprocity (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). These messages and efforts can help to develop mutual trust and respect, in which CLD families are more likely to actively participate and contribute to the success of their children (García & Ortiz, 2006).

*Response to Intervention.* RTI emerged originally from the mainstream educational field. It is a multi-tier comprehensive approach, including screening to identify academic difficulties at an early stage and providing high-quality instruction to all students in the general education setting (Tier 1), providing those identified students with double-dose interventions (Tier 2), and providing more intensive individualized intervention (Tier 3 and/or Tier 4).

RTI requires screening all children early in order to identify those with academic difficulties and those who do not respond to high quality classroom instruction. Then those identified will be provided with different levels of support via the use of research- or evidence-based instruction or intervention and the student progress monitoring (Batsche et al., 2005). RTI has the potential to support ELLs, many of whom are at risk for academic difficulties or failure (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). All ELLs need to be provided with culturally and linguistically appropriate instruction regardless of their educational setting. When applying the multi-tier RTI

system, Brown and Dolittle suggested that all students including ELLs be provided with high-quality and evidence-based instruction in the general education classroom, which is also referred to as Tier 1 instruction or intervention.

At Tier 1 of the RTI model, ELLs need to receive effective evidence-based literacy instruction in mainstream, bilingual, and ESL classrooms. A growing body of research on effective reading and literacy instruction for ELLs with and without disabilities has been developed (Artiles & Klingner, 2006), however not all ELLs have received appropriate reading and literacy instruction. One of the major reasons is that most mainstream teachers lack the training and expertise in teaching reading, literacy, and content areas to ELLs. In addition, many professionals (mainstream, bilingual, and ESL teachers) have great difficulty differentiating between a language difference and learning disability as indicated earlier (Collier, 2001; Klingner et al. 2006; Ortiz, 1997). There is a great need for all educators to have knowledge in first and second language acquisition and culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, and they need to work with specialists with expertise to differentiate language differences from disabilities (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). They also need to know the levels of language development and proficiency in their first and second language and they need to provide culturally responsive curricula and pedagogy that consider ELLs' backgrounds and experiences.

The progress of ELLs needs to be closely monitored for professionals to make decisions about whether or not they are meeting predetermined benchmarks or goals. Teachers, at the same time, need to modify their instruction and use different instructional strategies including re-teaching, small-group instruction, and peer tutoring to help those who are not making the targeted gains. If some of the ELLs continue to struggle after using evidence-based instruction and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, they may need Tier 2 supplemental support.

ELLs who are not making targeted gains need to be referred for Tier 2 support, meaning that they will receive Tier 2 instruction or intervention from specialists (i.e., reading specialist, ESL reading recovery teacher, special education teacher) in a small-group setting besides general education curriculum. It is a "double-dose" intervention approach geared toward helping ELLs reach the goals identified by Tier 1 screening (Brown & Dolittle, 2008, p. 68).

If those students do not make adequate progress or fail to respond to the double-dose interventions provided at Tier 2, they will be referred for more intensive interventions delivered in small-groups or individually for Tier 3 interventions. This stage can be either considered as a special education service-delivery stage (Tier 3) or as a stage for making eligibility decisions for special education services and then moving toward special education service delivery (Tier 4) (Brown & Dolittle, 2008).

It is critical that assessment, instruction, and progress monitoring are interconnected, and professionals collaborate closely to support and address the individual needs of the students including ELLs with and without disabilities. It is the hope that through RTI, students who

struggle can be identified early and supported before falling through the cracks (Brown & Dolittle, 2008).

*Early Intervention for ELLs with and without Disabilities.* Cummins (1989) stated that educators need to challenge and refine their roles if they want to successfully prevent academic difficulties, underachievement, and failure of CLD students. He suggested that professionals and schools stop viewing CLD students from a deficit perspective and they need to use an empowerment and advocacy approach by integrating the following:

1. Minority students' language and culture are incorporated into the school program.
2. Minority community participation is encouraged as an integral component of children's education.
3. The pedagogy promotes intrinsic motivation on the part of students to use language actively to generate their own knowledge.
4. Professionals involved in assessment become advocates for minority students by focusing primarily on the ways in which students' academic difficulty is a function of interactions within the school context rather than legitimizing the location of the "problem" within students. (p.113–114)

Educators who value and reinforce students' first language and add a second language and cultural affiliation to their repertoires (i.e., cultural assets, or funds of knowledge) in the process of preparing and assimilating them to the new culture and language will find more success in working with the ELLs. Cummins (1989) suggested that the major goal of early intervention is to prevent academic failure, dropout rates, and misdiagnosis and misplacement. He argued that traditional ways of using a deficit approach by identifying the students' cognitive deficits, using drilling for lower-level skills, and passive transmission pedagogy led to only failure. Instead, using a transactional approach by empowering students through an emphasis on first language (L1) promotion and on developing students' sense of cultural pride, and involving CLD families and communities requires a considerable change in professionals' role redefinition and change. Special suggestions include:

- Genuine dialogue between student and teacher in both oral and written modalities.
- Guidance and facilitation, rather than control of student learning by the teacher.
- Encouragement of student-to-student talk in a collaborative learning context.
- Encouragement of meaningful language use by students, rather than correctness of surface forms.
- Conscious integration of language use and development with all curricular content, rather than teaching language and other content as isolated subjects.
- A focus on developing higher level cognitive skills, rather than factual recall.
- Task presentation that generates intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, motivation. (Cummins, 1989, p. 115)

Prevention, pre-referral intervention, and early intervention have been interchangeably used in many situations. Fletcher, Barnes, and Francis (2002) and Ortiz (2002) pointed out that pre-referral intervention was used from 1970s because of concern about inappropriate identification and labeling of children for special education. These researchers argued that schools must be focused on preventing different types of academic and behavioral difficulties when providing pre-referral intervention. They further suggested that four key elements of culturally and linguistically responsive pre-referral intervention exist for CLD students. These elements are “(1) preventing school underachievement and failure, (2) early intervention for struggling learners, (3) diagnostic and prescriptive teaching, and (4) availability of general education problem-solving support systems” (García & Ortiz, 2006, p. 64).

The pre-referral process is often activated too late for struggling learners to be successful (García & Ortiz, 2006; Slavin & Madden, 1989). This claim is supported by the findings, referred to earlier, of a recent longitudinal study demonstrating that CLD students are underrepresented in special education in kindergarten and first grade, but they begin to be overrepresented in special education in later grades (Samson & Lesaux, 2009). We should make efforts to understand why this gap occurs and how to eliminate this gap by implementing early intervention strategies as soon as CLD students begin showing academic or behavior problems. Slavin and Madden (1989) suggest that the term *early intervention* be used rather than *pre-referral intervention* because pre-referral intervention may imply that it is a step before placement of students in special education. Timely general-education support systems (i.e., early intervention strategies or services provided in the general education classroom setting) for struggling learners are important for improving academic performance and reducing inappropriate special education referrals.

Early intervention should happen at both the classroom and school levels. At the classroom level, teachers use diagnostic and clinical teaching approaches to identify and respond to the students' learning difficulties. Diagnostic approaches can help identify students' strengths and needs. Once students' academic or behavior difficulties are identified, they need to be provided with clinical teaching. Clinical teaching is carefully sequenced instruction. Teachers (a) teach skills, subjects, or concepts; (b) re-teach students who fail to meet expected performance levels through modifications; (c) use informal assessment strategies (i.e., observation, curriculum-based assessments, etc.) to monitor students' progress (Ortiz, 2002); and (d) use these evaluation data to plan and/or modify instruction (King-Sears, Burgess, & Lawson, 1999). Assessment data, along with documentation of efforts to improve student performance and the results of these efforts, are invaluable for decisions for remedial support programs or referral to special education programs (García & Ortiz, 2006; Ortiz, 2002).

Teachers also need to have support systems available for further problem-solving if intervention at the classroom level does not work (Ortiz, 2002). They need to work with school-wide support systems, such as peer and expert consultation, general education problem-solving teams (i.e., teacher assistance teams or child study or child support teams), and alternative

programs such as those that offer tutorial or remedial instruction in the context of general education (García & Ortiz, 2006; Ortiz, 2002).

Prevention and early intervention should not discourage special education referrals. Rather, they should be used as mechanisms for improving the academic achievement of CLD students and for reducing the number of students at risk of failing, inappropriately referred to remedial or special education programs, and/or misdiagnosed as having a disability (García & Ortiz, 2006).

## **Research**

Research in bilingual special education has paid much attention to identification and assessment while less attention has been given to effective service delivery models and practices for ELLs with disabilities. McCray and García (2002) have proposed four themes that we believe should guide researchers in this field. These themes are “(1) authenticity, legitimization, and multiplicity of voices; (2) multicultural preparation of special educators; (3) validation of culturally and linguistically responsive special education models of service delivery and pedagogy; and (4) underserved populations in special education” (p. 604). Each of them will be described in depth in the following paragraphs.

### **Authenticity, legitimization and multiplicity of voices**

Given the specific sociocultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups represented, the sociocultural experiences, beliefs, and traditions of ELLs with and without disabilities and their families must be documented as an integral part of the bilingual special education research agenda. Theoretical models need to be developed that will help determine culturally and linguistically responsive practices, and whether, and to what extent they are relevant, to whom and how best to implement them in culturally and linguistically relevant contexts.

Similarly, we need to document the voices of practitioners (i.e., teachers, assessment personnel, counselors, administrators) who are involved in the identification, development, and implementation of educational practices. Most issues discussed in current teacher education research are related to values and assumptions, complexities, and challenges of multicultural preparation of teachers for general and special education. We also need to engage in collaborative research with practitioners (i.e., action research). Questions suggested by McCray and García (2002, p. 605) below may be excellent ones for collaborative research:

- How do we address culture, race, ethnicity, language, disability, and the interaction among these factors in special education?
- How can we fulfill the intent of IDEA and design a system that is culturally and linguistically sensitive and responsive to diversity?
- Are there general principles and guidelines that apply across and within various racial/ethnic and linguistic groups?

- What are the essential and unique characteristics within and across racial/ethnic and linguistic groups that must be addressed in service delivery in special education?
- What is the role of language in service delivery to CLD students with disabilities and their families?
- What service delivery models can be developed to deliver culturally and linguistically sensitive services to CLD students with disabilities and their families?

McCray and García (2002) and Pugach (2001) pointed out two issues that have not been addressed much in multicultural education, bilingual education, and special education: (a) the interactions between disability, culture, and language; and (b) the interplay of disability with race, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and language. Specific sociocultural factors include “the family’s response to the impairment; their views and expectations about normalcy, developmental milestones, intelligence, and ability; childrearing traditions; and the linguistic characteristics of the family and community” (McCray & García, 2002, p. 608). Given these sociocultural factors then, it is critical that researchers explore and develop an understanding of the sociocultural contexts of disability and the impact of bilingual special education on student learning and performance.

#### **Multicultural preparation of special educator**

One of the major challenges facing the service delivery to ELLs with disabilities is that, due to the severe shortage of bilingual/bicultural special educators, they are often served in English-only settings with few or no language modifications. Similarly, language instruction provided through ESL may not be adapted in response to their disability, because few ESL personnel are familiar with modifications needed for students with disabilities (Cloud, 1993; Ortiz & García, 1990). The competencies of bilingual special education teachers listed above provided some guidelines for teacher training and professional development. However, very little research exists regarding the profiles of successful teachers of ELLs with disabilities, the process of nurturing these attributes, and the development of intercultural competence for special educators and effective teacher education programs that prepare bilingual special educators.

#### **Responsive special education models of service delivery and pedagogy**

The importance and components of culturally and linguistically responsive services have been documented in literature. However, there is a scarce research base in this area. Investigations are needed related to program models that will be most effective in meeting the language-development needs of students with disabilities. It would be important to explore the types of co-teaching or collaborative consultation structures that will be effective in designing the necessary adaptations for students’ educational needs based on disability, culture, and language. In addition, we do not know enough about the collaborative service-delivery models (i.e., RTI for ELLs with and without disabilities) that are developed to meet the unique needs of ELLs, especially those with disabilities.

### **Underserved populations in special education**

Patterns of underrepresentation and underserved populations from CLD backgrounds exist. The following three groups seem to have been ignored: The first group has disability related educational needs, but has neither been identified nor served in special education for various reasons. The reluctance of teachers and other school personnel to refer them for special education assessment and identification may be due to fear of litigation, lack of understanding of the legal guidelines related to appropriate identification and placement procedures (i.e., IDEA, 2004), lack of awareness of the students' cultural and/or linguistic characteristics, and the complexities involved in distinguishing differences from disability. The underrepresentation of Asian-American and Latino students are at greater risk of being ignored because educators cannot distinguish characteristics of second-language acquisition from their disability-related symptoms. The second group is those in secondary education who will transition to work, community, and rehabilitation agencies. Within this group, the high dropout rate for Hispanic youth may be due to lack of appropriate educational and related services to these students. The third group includes young children with disabilities from CLD backgrounds. It is almost unknown to what extent these young children are served in early intervention and if their language and other needs are supported by educational and other related services.

### **Major Accomplishments and Future Directions**

The last three decades have witnessed much progress as well as many challenges in the bilingual special education field. Still, much needs to be done to improve the understanding of many issues facing the field and the outcomes of the students this field serves. Legislative regulations (i.e., IDEA, No Child Left Behind) as well as the development of educational models (i.e., culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, and response to intervention) have advanced this field in comparison to other fields. These laws, policies, and initiatives have created hope that professionals will be brought together across disciplines and services to address the multilayered needs of CLD students with disabilities (i.e., language development, disability, academic and behavioral development, etc.). Even though fields (i.e., English as a Second Language, regular education, special education, school psychology) still function separately, collaborative service-delivery models have been developed (i.e., co-teaching, child study teams, etc.). In order to address the needs of CLD students with disabilities in a holistic manner, the following elements proposed by García and Ortiz (2006) need to be in place:

1. shared responsibility among educators for educating all students,
2. availability of a range of general education services and programs,
3. collaborative relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse families, and
4. ongoing professional development focused on effective practices for culturally and linguistically diverse learners. (p. 64)

Another promising area in research is the use of eco-behavioral analysis approach with ELLs with and without disabilities. An eco-behavioral analysis approach includes “(a) analyzing a broad range of environmental variables that are temporarily and spatially removed from the behavior of individuals, including those variables that are within environmental, social, and cultural contexts; and (b) evaluating the effectiveness of instruction and interventions in classroom settings as a means of addressing classroom contextual factors that affect the outcomes of students with and without disabilities” (Arreaga-Mayer, Utley, Perdono-Rivera, & Greenwood, 2003, p. 29). This type of research has been used to examine why children living in impoverished urban communities are academically behind as early as kindergarten and first grade. Greenwood, Carta, and Atwater (1991) remarked that “eco-behavioral analysis offers education a powerful, expanded process measure for the study of the delivery of teaching and its effects on students, including the causes of academic success and failure” (p. 63). The use of ecological models of assessment can examine and document the learning problems “in light of contextual variables affecting the teaching–learning process, including the interaction of teachers, students, curriculum, instructional variables, and so forth” (Gersten & Baker, 2000, p. 125). Earlier studies using the ecobehavioral analysis approach revealed important differences between the practices and school achievement levels of at-risk students in low-SES schools and students in middle- to high-SES schools (Greenwood, Delquadri, Stanley, Terry, & Hall, 1986).

Considering the limited research on instructional contextual variables, there is a compelling need to assess aspects of the classroom environment using observational measurement and to evaluate bilingual special education programs in terms of essential features of effective intervention programs on the academic outcomes of ELLs (Gersten & Baker, 2000). The field of special education must address the following critical questions:

1. How do bilingual special education programs for ELLs with disabilities work?
2. What interventions tend to produce positive outcomes for ELLs with disabilities?
3. How can educators promote long-term gains cognitively, linguistically, and educationally through these interventions?

Answers to these questions require the use of observational assessment procedures that are responsive to the complexities of individual ELLs and instructional contexts in bilingual special education programs (Arreaga-Mayer et al., 2003). Classroom process variables (i.e., the assessment of teacher behavior, student behavior, contextual variables), students’ interactions with the environment (or ecological factors) can be studied to determine if instruction is optimizing or limiting the performance of ELLs. Thus, eco-behavioral analysis is an approach for evaluating instructional interventions in relation to program aspects (e.g., instructional environment components, teacher behaviors, student behaviors) and identifying instructional variables that reliably influence academic and linguistic performance (Arreaga-Mayer, Carta, & Tapia, 1994; Arreaga-Mayer et al., 2003). Gersten and Baker suggested that well-designed and well-executed studies are needed to reveal the causal links between features of instruction and learning outcomes. Classroom-based research on ELLs at risk for developmental disabilities

must incorporate the use of effective instructional practices that facilitate academic engagement and student performance (Arreaga-Mayer et al., 2003).

An eco-behavioral analysis approach to understand the teaching–learning process for ELLs with disabilities holds promise. Future research needs to be focused on understanding sociocultural contexts for teacher preparation, service delivery, family-professional collaboration, and teaching-learning that will produce positive outcomes for ELLs with and without disabilities. The fragmented service models or systems seem to be the major reason for delaying the early intervention services that all children who struggle need badly. The response to intervention model has the potential to screen learning and behavior problems early to prevent academic difficulties and/or failure of all students including CLD students with disabilities. This model also has the potential for bringing professionals from different fields (i.e., regular education, special education, bilingual or ESL specialists) together and for crossing the boundaries created by regulations, funding, etc. Through this model, prevention, early intervention, and different levels of support need to be provided in time and with intensity in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner across professionals from different disciplines and fields.

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