

## **Breaking the Cycle of Failure for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners with Exceptional Needs: Recommendations for Improvement of Teacher Preparation Programs**

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### **Abstract**

Teaching English Learners with exceptional needs requires educators to tackle a complex and multidimensional task of a) providing quality core or content area instruction, b) supporting students' academic language and literacy development in English, and c) addressing differences in learning. While educational research and practice search for successful instructional methods to support these learners, educational statistics show that students with exceptional needs from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds continue to be at high risk for academic failure. The article reviews the current state of the field and discusses the mechanisms for combining culturally and linguistically responsive literacy instruction and assessment methods effective for teaching diverse students with disabilities. It provides readers with instructional tools for breaking the cycle of misidentification—failure to teach—failure to learn and presents recommendations for improving the overall quality of teacher education programs to prepare teacher candidates to work with diverse exceptional learners successfully.

### **Introduction: State of the Field and Problem Statement**

Prior to discussing effective instructional methods for education learners with exceptional needs from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds we would like to provide a brief overview of the educational context and outline the persistent challenges faced in schools today.

### **School Contexts and Challenges**

Cultural and linguistic diversity (CLD) can be reflected in a variety of ways. Often, schools operate using monolingual instruction and follow standards that reflect culturally White norms. Thus, the dominant practices at school can create particular challenges for emergent bilingual students. In this article, authors use the term “CLD students” to refer to a) students whose home language(s) are one other than or in addition to English (e.g., English Learners, b) students who speak a variety of English dialects, or c) English speakers who come from racial/ethnic backgrounds that have been historically marginalized. While CLD students possess an impressive capital of linguistic, metalinguistic, and metacultural knowledge and awareness (Athanasopoulos et al., 2015; Kamhi-Stein & Osipova, 2019), the school system fails to recognize it. Consequently, teachers are often unable to use these students' existing strengths and skills as a foundation for successful learning.

Within the population of CLD students, learners with exceptional needs are a vulnerable and further marginalized population whose strengths are particularly underutilized and whose needs are often understudied. While researchers and practitioners continue the multi-decade search for effective teaching methods for this population of students, the difficulties that the students face,

such as high dropout rates, lack of academic and prosocial engagement, consistent academic failure and retention, and behavioral challenges, continue (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Sullivan, 2011). Research shows that students with home language(s) other than English continuously experience challenges with achievement and successful acquisition of academic language and literacy in U.S. public schools (Haager & Osipova, 2017; Pereira & de Oliveira, 2015). These students, whose rich linguistic assets are deemed insufficient to reflect “adequate” progress according to standardized assessments, are often classified as “Long-Term English Learners.” This educational classification is critiqued for its deficit-based perspective and its tendency to reify achievement gaps (Thompson, 2015). Many students who are classified as “Long-Term English Learners” are also identified as students with disabilities (Torre Gibney & Henry, 2019). Currently, a disproportionate representation of “English Learners” in special education settings is on the rise (Cartledge, Kea, Watson, & Oif, 2016; Ovando, Maddocks, & Valenzuela, 2019). CLD students with exceptional needs continuously demonstrate the largest discrepancies in performance on standardized tests when compared to “English-proficient” peers without disabilities, particularly in the area of literacy (Ortiz & Robertson, 2018).

Research reflects controversies surrounding the notion of disproportionate representation in special education on the basis of race/language (Collins et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2016). Persistence of systemic practices and ineffective literacy instruction have been noted to perpetuate students’ academic struggles and slow progress in acquiring academic English (Brooks, 2016; Kibler et al., 2017). This view emanates from the “culture as disability” position within the field of Disabilities Studies and the DisCrit theoretical framework (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). The underlying beliefs here are that dis/abling conditions are socially located and that a dis/ability is not a problem that needs to be cured, remediated, or eliminated (Varenne & McDermott, 2018). With a DisCrit lens, the root causes of linguistic and academic struggles lie within the school system, where numerous factors are at work to marginalize and oppress “English Learners” with exceptional needs. These include biased assessments (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2019); English-only instruction (Callahan, Wilkinson, Muller, & Friso, 2009); word-level instruction that prevails over syntax- and discourse-focused instruction (Osipova, 2014); and lack of culturally relevant instruction (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006), which serves to undermine self-esteem and render students’ linguistic and cultural assets invisible (Rodriguez, Hussain, Padilla, 2018; Wright & Taylor, 1995). Moreover, there is very limited research available that might offer guidance on expected trajectories of growth in academic language for CLD students with exceptional needs (Linan-Thompson, Lara-Martinez, & Cavazos, 2018). This brief overview of student-centered issues indicates that existing assessment and teaching methods do not successfully address the unique learning needs of CLD students, especially those with exceptionalities.

### **School Context and Challenges Faced by Teachers**

Both general education and special education teachers report feeling underprepared to work with CLD students with exceptional needs (Miranda, Wells, & Jenkins, 2019; Villegas, 2018). General education teachers and teachers of English as a Second Language (TESOL) typically receive very little training that focuses on meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Therefore, general education and TESOL practitioners, while being experts in their profession, are too often inadequately trained to distinguish between disability, differences in learning, and academic and behavioral difficulties stemming from the lack of quality instruction. Similarly, special education teachers, who are trained in supporting students with disabilities, often are

unfamiliar with TESOL and/or culturally responsive practices (Ortiz & Robertson, 2018). An additional challenge reported by schools is the shortage of bilingual special education teachers and bilingual general education teachers (Hopkins & Schutz, 2019). Teachers who are bilingual themselves are likely to be more capable of identifying academic and behavioral difficulties that are intensified by the cultural irrelevance of curricula and cultural insensitivity of instructors (Wang & Woolf, 2015). However, bilingual education training alone is neither the main nor the only solution to meeting the unique needs of CLD students with exceptionalities. Studies report that teachers who did not major in TESOL lack comprehensive training in teaching approaches that focus on an in-depth understanding of bilingual language development needed to support “English Learners” (Palmer & Martinez, 2013). As a result, the current state of the educational field reveals that teachers holding a specific teaching credential (whether TESOL, multiple or single subjects, or education specialist credential) are undertrained and underprepared to teach the most vulnerable population of students: CLD students with disabilities. The implications from the overview of the state of the field highlight the need for improvement of teacher preparation program quality through deepening *all* teachers’ expertise in evidence-based approaches for the successful education of CLD students, and especially those with exceptional needs.

### **Review of Effective Pedagogical Approaches and Suggestions for Innovative Methods**

This section addresses some of the factors as potentially contributing to the lack of academic progress in CLD students and misidentification trends in assessment, instruction, and school-wide practices. We also argue for a more balanced approach to assessment and instruction that allows the teachers working with CLD learners to use meaningful and in-depth methods that provide CLD students with opportunities to learn and succeed. We structure our discussion in alignment with the four domains of high-leverage practices outlined in 2017 by McLeskey and colleagues: assessment, instruction, social/behavioral supports, and collaboration.

### **Comprehensive Assessment Approaches**

Determining whether or not an “English Learner” has a disability is one of the most complex decisions that the teachers face. Very often, the learning profiles of “struggling” emergent bilingual students are very similar to those of students with disabilities. These include but are not limited to difficulties with processing oral presentation of content; phonemic and phonological awareness (e.g., sound recognition and manipulation, letter-sound correspondence); limited ability to comprehend and follow directions, difficulty sustaining attention; trouble with sight word recognition, memorization of vocabulary, as well as problems with reading comprehension and written expression (Hoover, Baca, & Klingner, 2016). However, the nature and roots of these difficulties are very different in the two populations. While the struggles of students with disabilities are often attributed to impaired attention, weak auditory and/or visual memory, compromised organizational skills and metacognition, CLD students experience difficulties with similar tasks due to *unfamiliar* phonology, orthography, morphology, limited general and academic vocabulary, differences in syntax and discourse structures of their first (native) language (L1) and the language that they are acquiring (L2). Table 1 illustrates the differences in the nature of similar learning difficulties exhibited by CLD students and students with disabilities.

Table 1

*Roots of Common Academic Difficulties Shared by CDL Students and Students with Disabilities*

<b>Roots of Difficulties for CLD Students</b>	<b>Common Difficulties Exhibited by ELs and Students with Disabilities</b>	<b>Roots of Difficulties for Students with Disabilities</b>
Unfamiliar sounds in the newly acquired language	<b>Difficulty with phonemic and phonological awareness</b>	Impaired auditory processing
Difficulty maintaining attention due to lack of comprehension	<b>Difficulty sustaining attention</b>	Impaired ability to pay attention
Insufficient knowledge of the second language	<b>Difficulties with understanding and following directions</b>	Impaired working memory
Abstract meaning of many sight words	<b>Difficulties with sight word recognition</b>	Impaired visual memory and/or short term memory
Insufficient knowledge of the second language, including vocabulary, syntax, and narrative structure; different or insufficient background knowledge	<b>Difficulties with reading comprehension</b>	Impaired attention, memory, and metacognition Insufficient reading practice due to difficulties
Lack of familiarity with genres; lack of practice with oral and written expression in the second language	<b>Difficulties with written expression</b>	Difficulty with organization, planning, metacognition

\*Based on Hoover, Baca, and Klingner (2016).

The table above serves as an illustration of academic difficulties commonly experienced by both CLD students and students with disabilities. For more detailed and more extensive reviews of the topic, please see Hoover, Baca, and Klinger (2016) and *English Learner Tool Kit* (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

It is important to remember that neither the most expert tester nor a single assessment measure is sufficient to come to establish the presence of a disability. Therefore, assessment of CLD students must go beyond the assessment of academic skills merely using both English and the student's native language, as required by law (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). The assessment team has to use a comprehensive approach that combines formal and informal assessment tools, a careful review of the student's developmental, academic, and behavioral history, and medical records. Additionally, the assessment cannot be solely based on within-the-student variables but must consider the environment and context in which the student demonstrates academic and/or behavioral difficulties. Thus, it is crucial to include a series of thorough observations of the student's class performance. Finally, given that even the most thorough assessment results in the description of a student's present levels of performance (a slice of time, usually limited in its duration), careful progress monitoring of her skills development and response to instruction/intervention are needed to further confirm potential presence of a disability.

Assessment in English and student's home language(s) can establish whether the difficulties exhibited by the student in English at school are consistent with any difficulties the student might show in their home language(s). Bilingual students with language-processing and reading disabilities (e.g., Speech Language Impairment; Armon-Lotem & de Jong, 2015) or dyslexia (Klein & Doctor, 2003) more often than not tend to present similar profiles of difficulties across

languages, especially if the languages share similar phonology, morphology, or script. The similarity of difficulty patterns is moderated by numerous factors, including “proficiency” across languages and the orthographic complexity of the languages (Lindgren & Laine, 2011). For example, an emergent bilingual (Spanish/English) student with dyslexia who struggles with phonemic awareness skills in spoken English is also likely to struggle with sound recognition and manipulation (e.g., deletion, substitution) in Spanish. In contrast, an emergent bilingual student without disabilities might exhibit difficulties with phonemic awareness, specifically when the tasks involve sounds that are different or absent in the student’s native language. Additionally, the majority of errors made by an emergent bilingual student with a disability are generally less consistent, cannot always be consistently traced to the student’s home language(s), and tend to persist despite an instruction that targets them. In contrast, errors of an emergent bilingual student without a disability are likely to resemble the morphological, syntactic, and discourse structure of the student’s native language. Research also documents trajectories in emergent bilingual errors that signal specific stages in language development. That is, emergent bilingual students progress from a stage that is heavily influenced by home language(s) to the stage in which their written and spoken language features approximations of English and concludes with the stage at which “errors” gradually reduce (Linan-Thompson et al., 2018). CLD students with disabilities deviate from the expected trajectories as “errors” persist beyond the stages of language development.

Research also cautions that assessing CLD students in their native language does not completely resolve assessment bias (Blatchley & Lau, 2010). When testing CLD learners, it is critical to determine whether the tasks present a cultural, ethnic, or socio-economic bias and whether the examinee is familiar with and understands the nature of the task that she needs to perform. For example, a task that requires the examinee to create a first-person narrative told by a baseball player or a cross-country runner could present a cultural bias for a CLD student who is not familiar with those sports. A task that requires a student to argue against a given statement presupposes that she is familiar with the argument construction in English, constituting a cultural bias against a student who hasn’t been exposed to such tasks.

The use of both formal and informal assessment measures is beneficial for assessing CLD students. While formal standardized norm-referenced assessments are scripted, typically rigid in ways of administration, and often prone to bias, they tend to assess a broad scope of academic skills and knowledge. The use of informal assessment combined with the formal measures allows for a more in-depth examination of student’s performance, both in the areas of strength and need. Understanding the differences in language development and disability-related errors along with the careful analysis of student oral and written language samples that focuses on the structure and categories of errors allow the educators to recognize apparent differences in the language use of a student acquiring English and a student who is acquiring English and struggling with a disability. Table 2 presents two writing samples that illustrate this point. The sample on the left is from a writing sample of an EL without a disability. The sample on the right is written by an EL with a learning disability.

Table 2

*Differences in Errors: Written Samples of CLD Students With and Without Disability*

Essay Excerpt Written by EL Without a Disability	Essay Excerpt Written by EL With a Learning Disability
<p>Last century people countrees raced to space. Today we still are flying to space. But the planes (rockits) cost, are expensive, and sometimes the pilots are danger. Astroids could get in the path of the rockit. If the rockit doesn't work the pilots could die. But when the rockit works the pilots and their countree gets rewards. We need to explor space for scientist Science.</p> <p>(12th grade Level 1 EL sample;  <a href="https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/eslapb/writingsamples/grade12_level1.html">https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/eslapb/writingsamples/grade12_level1.html</a>)</p>	<p>The program is for aliment, testing, and setting the spectrometer. Because speed was not a ishu for this program, it was changed form a pre-made program abtaned from Nacional Instrments. Because of these it has a lot of part that are not used and not be touched. Warning this program does not have any type of freed back from the spectrometers so if the rong numbers are put in a feild it might though a linement off.</p> <p>(12th grade Level 2 EL with a learning disability sample; author's personal collection of students' work samples)</p>

When working with CLD students, it is important to determine whether the difficulties exhibited in class and during assessment can be attributed to the student's academic, behavioral, or health history, and to rule out mistaking lack of exposure to curriculum, school norms, and/or correctable problems with vision and hearing for disability. Examining the CLD student's classroom, family, and community contexts adds to educators' understanding of the student's learning trajectory. It could also expose the biases in other assessment measures. Analyzing teacher-students and student-to-student interactions within the classroom allows the educator to conclude whether the struggling CLD student is getting adequate access to instruction. The absence of explicit instruction in combination with the lack of basic language and behavior supports including visuals, realia, comprehensible input, frequent checks for understanding, accompanied by specific corrective feedback, significantly limits CLD learners' access to curriculum, meaningful classroom interaction with instructor and peers, and reduces learning opportunities (Hogan & Hathcote, 2014).

Gathering interview data to better understand the student's family and community socio-linguistic environment complements the results of formal and informal assessment data collected through testing, observations, and records review. While interviewing the student's family, it is important to note any family history of language delay, disability evident in family members using L1, and literacy difficulties that run in the family. Research shows that language- and literacy-related disabilities are often hereditary (Olson, Rack, Conners, DeFries, & Fulker, 2012; Peer & Reid, 2013). Being aware of student's family perspectives and home environment, along with an understanding of the student's community, often balances an assessment-based profile of student's strengths and weaknesses, completing the picture by adding the missing variables of family's and community's linguistic, cultural and behavioral norms and expectations. While CLD students rarely match the norming samples of commercially available assessment measures, comparisons on the basis of growth in English, achievement in core and content area classes, and functioning in social-emotional domains can be made to same-age peers without disabilities who come from the same socio-economic and ethno-linguistic community. These comparisons provide important information for determining whether the student's struggles are significantly out of the norm (Blatchley & Lau, 2010).

Our discussion of assessment approaches would be incomplete without a mention of approaches to progress monitoring. Even the most comprehensive assessment battery provides the educators with a static picture of the CLD student's present levels of performance. Still, it says

nothing about the rate of growth in student's skills and knowledge or her responsiveness to instruction/interventions. Therefore, carefully designed and implemented monitoring of the student's progress is a necessary component of the assessment-instruction cycle. Here research cautions educators against drawing ungrounded conclusions regarding CLD student's lack of progress and possible disability, if a) the evidence-based practices chosen to boost CLD student's performance have not been verified as successful specifically for CLD students and b) if the student shows slower progress than her CLD peers coming from differing backgrounds (Harry & Klingner, 2014). CLD students are an incredibly diverse group. English learning and development, as well as curriculum mastery, occur at various rates.

To summarize, distinguishing the learning profiles of a CLD student who is slow in acquisition and development of English and core/content area skills and a CLD student with a disability is a difficult task for which research and practice do not offer a single, straightforward and uniform assessment approach. Teams of educators working to determine whether a student has a disability must consider student-specific and environment-specific variables. A few indicators pointing towards a possibility of a combined CLD-disability profile include:

- 1) significantly low school performance combined with low performance on formal and informal assessment measures that cannot be explained by environmental, socio-economic factors or medical and school records;
- 2) family history of language and literacy-related disabilities;
- 3) inconsistent and unstable patterns of errors that persist despite the instruction and cannot be traced to student's first language;
- 4) evidence that the student is struggling while consistently receiving standard EL supports to ensure access to instruction;
- 5) the consensus across school personnel and student's family that the student needs assistance and will benefit from intensive intervention;
- 6) evidence that the student is not progressing despite the thorough, consistent implementation of research-based instruction that has been shown effective for CLD students of similar profiles and that has been implemented with fidelity for a sufficient period of time;
- 7) family interviews and analysis of CLD peers performance indicate that noted differences and difficulties in English development and content learning cannot be attributed to differences in linguistic, social, and cultural norms; and
- 8) progress monitoring results indicate that the student is not responding to intervention or is demonstrating an unusually slow or erratic trajectory of growth incommensurate with growth expectations necessary for English-acquisition and academic success.

Teachers coming from varying specializations will find recognition of some of the indicators listed above easier than others. This is why referral, assessment, and the high-stakes decision making regarding disability eligibility of CLD students must be carried out as a multidisciplinary team approach. However, it is also imperative that teacher preparation programs in all specializations address the principles of comprehensive unbiased assessment and provide opportunities for in-depth assessment practice, collaborative implementation and analysis, and thorough feedback provided by faculty experts (more on this in the section of the chapter dedicated to recommendations for teacher preparation programs). Having reviewed assessment approaches

recommended for struggling CLD students, we now examine instructional methods that have been shown beneficial for teaching this student population.

### **Promising Pedagogical Approaches: Effective Instruction and Social Supports**

While no singular teaching approach has been found as a panacea to the academic difficulties experienced by CLD students with exceptional needs, research has documented a number of pedagogical methods that have been shown to be relatively effective. Recent studies indicate that training teachers in combining culturally and linguistically responsive instruction with high leverage special education practices holds a powerful promise for addressing the complex needs of diverse learners with special needs (Klingner & Soltero-González, 2009; Haager & Osipova, 2017).

Culturally and linguistically responsive instruction combines the framework of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) with thorough attention to students' language and literacy development. Geneva Gay (2010) defined CRP as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 31). Linguistically responsive instruction focuses specifically on supporting CLD students' second and/or academic language acquisition and incorporates the principles of effective EL instruction (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Linguistically responsive instruction is particularly crucial for CLD students with disabilities (and language and literacy related disabilities, especially) because it directly addresses the complex nature of linguistic difficulties experienced by these students, while scaffolding the overall language and literacy input using the framework of EL instruction. The combination of CRP and linguistically responsive instruction motivates the diverse learners by making the content relevant, relatable, and applicable to their lives. It helps them overcome the linguistic challenges of comprehending content and oral and written L2 production. At the same time, this approach recognizes CLD students' cognitive, cultural, and multilingual capital and builds upon their strengths.

CRP's framework is comprised of four critical distinguishing principles that serve as a foundation for instruction: Culturally Responsive Caring, Culture and Communication in the Classroom, Cultural Congruity in Teaching and Learning, and Ethnically and Culturally Diverse Curriculum Content (Gay, 2010). Table 3 presents these principles along with academic and social activities that the teachers working with CLD students could incorporate into their instruction. Examples of activities provided in Figure 3 carry both teacher and student agency. CRP aims to result in personal growth in both instructors and learners through becoming aware of and critically self-examining personal biases, disrupting dominant-culture discourse, and recognizing the multitude of perspectives that enrich reciprocal collective learning.



Table 3

*CRP Principles and Academic and Social Classroom Activities Aligned with Them\**

<p><b>The Principle of Culturally Responsive Caring</b> Is a “combination of concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action” (Gay, 2010, p.48). Activities based on this principle aim to create a supportive and respectful classroom community where students develop their identities while building academic competence and confidence. Teaching and learning rooted in culturally responsive caring promote the development of self-identity and build self-esteem in CLD learners.</p> <p><i>Examples of activities</i> in-depth teacher-student and student-to-student conversations, getting to know student families and communities, conducting peer observations to accurately determine students’ strengths and needs and to reduce potential instructor bias (Toppel, 2015).</p>	<p><b>The Principle of Culture and Communication in the Classroom</b> Pertains to language, culture, and communication that are built into content instruction and demonstration of content acquisition. It requires teachers and students to work together to examine, compare, and reconcile differences in peer-to-peer and teacher-student communication, language and communication patterns, cultural norms, and to establish common means of respectful classroom communication. Through attention to cultural and communication differences, this principle addresses students’ self-identity.</p> <p><i>Examples of activities:</i> examination and challenging of personal biases by teachers and students; practicing collective and individual narrative construction; code switching between informal and formal types of discourse; and engaging in dialogic rather than authoritative interactions (e.g., asking the speakers how and why they arrived at a particular answer rather than labeling responses as “correct” or “incorrect” (Chin, 2007).</p>
<p><b>The Principle of Cultural Congruity in Teaching and Learning</b> Ensures that instruction is connected to students’ sociocultural and linguistic experiences, that classroom interactions are respectful and mindful of differences in cultural norms of communication, and that teachers recognize and scaffold culture-specific ways in which CLD students organize their knowledge, express ideas and thoughts, and behave when they are actively learning (Gay, 2010). The principle bolsters self-efficacy in CLD learners.</p> <p><i>Examples of activities:</i> cooperative learning, collaborative problem solving, reciprocal teaching and learning; classroom-home collaboration; working and learning within the communities (Toppel, 2015; Bajaj, Argenal, &amp; Canlas, 2017).</p>	<p><b>The Principle of Ethnically and Culturally Diverse Curriculum Content</b> Warrants that students are empowered by gaining meaningful and valuable skills and knowledge through a curriculum that is relevant and accessible for students. CLD learners’ cultural heritages serve as main and/or supplementary curricular sources that focus on “the histories, cultures, contributions, experiences, perspectives, and issues of [students’] respective ethnic groups” (Gay, 2010, p. 128). An ethnically and culturally diverse curriculum nurtures the development of self-concept and self-identity in CLD learners by recognizing their roots and honoring their heritage.</p> <p><i>Examples of activities:</i> delivering and analyzing content in ways that are relevant to students’ ethnic and cultural norms, drama activities, activities that incorporate relevant and diverse forms of music, art, and movement, collaborative projects and presentations based on and featuring linguistic and socio-cultural capital shared by CLD students (Toppel, 2015).</p>

\*Based on Kamhi-Stein and Osipova (2019)

CRP validates CLD students’ experiences. Its principles support students’ intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning. CRP-based teaching and learning empower diverse students by allowing them to build the positive sense of self-efficacy (Kelly, Siwatu, Tost, & Martinex, 2015), self-concept (Sevig, Highlen, & Adams, 2000), and self-esteem (Bonner, Warren, & Jiang, 2018; Cartledge, Keesey, Bennett, Ramnath, & Council, 2016). Research associates CLD students’

positive self-efficacy beliefs promoted by CRP with an increase in students' productivity accompanied by greater performance expectations and more efficient problem solving, in other words, academic behaviors that have been linked to academic success (Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008; Siwatu, 2009, 2011). In contrast with English-only, dominant culture-based instruction that results in subtractive assimilation of CLD learners and leads to acculturation stress, low self-esteem, and cultural and linguistic identity crisis (Metz, 2017; 2018), CRP nurtures learners' self-esteem and builds positive sense of multicultural multilingual identity (Johnson & Owen, 2013). CRP dismisses the deficit views of CLD learners recognizing their strengths and the richness of their experiences. Cultivating self-esteem and positive self-identity is especially critical for supporting the vulnerable population of CLD students with disabilities, who are especially at risk for academic failure and school dropout discussed in the introduction. Studies show that positive self-identity correlates with higher academic achievement (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Self-concept and self-esteem have been linked by research as highly correlated with motivation, school completion, and post-secondary educational and professional aspirations (Green, Liem, Martin, Colmar, Marsh, & McInerney, 2012; Huitt, 2004).

Linguistically responsive instruction transforms ELs who are frequently viewed as less competent speakers of English into learners who possess deep and rich trans-linguistic competence through recognizing patterns of similarities and differences between languages and who are capable of successfully and efficiently building English language and literacy on the dominant language foundation. Linguistically responsive teaching explicitly focuses on multiple levels of language and literacy (e.g., word, sentence, and discourse/text levels) in the context of reading, writing, and content-area instruction, demonstrating the nuances in vocabulary use, syntax, and discourse across academic areas (Osipova, 2014). It is important to note that linguistically responsive instruction encourages teachers and students to compare students' L1 and L2 and uses their L1 competencies as assets in L2 development. This elevates L1 social and academic status within the classroom and empowers diverse learners as writers, readers, and scholars. Additionally, linguistically responsive explicit instruction supports CLD students with exceptional needs, many of whom struggle with academic language and literacy. In this section we take a closer look at the word, sentence, and text focus of linguistically responsive instruction and discuss strategies that work best for teaching CLD students with disabilities. We also provide suggestions to support these students in sustaining attention and scaffold the tasks that require memorization.

*Word level* approaches for teaching CLD students with disabilities center on thorough instruction of all categories of words that these diverse learners come across: 1) content area-specific words (e.g., "hypotenuse"), 2) general academic words that are found across academic areas (e.g., "analyze," "argue"), 3) words that change their meaning depending on the content area (so-called polysemous words, e.g., "sphere") (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; DeLuca, 2010). The latter category requires drawing CLD students' attention to parts of speech such as prepositions, their use and meaning depending on the context and/or content area (e.g., compare the meaning of "against the wall" and "protest against...") (Lorincz & Gordon, 2012; Osipova, 2014). While competent English speakers are less likely to struggle with determining word meaning in categories 2 and 3, CLD learners with disabilities experience considerable difficulties in use and interpretation of these vocabulary categories, which contributes to challenges in reading comprehension, oral and written expression. These difficulties can be attributed to negative L1 and L2 transfer and lack of thorough, explicit instruction focused on these word categories (Brabham, Buskist, Henderson, Paleologos, & Baugh, 2012; Carlo et al., 2004 ). Studies show that CLD students with disabilities benefit from direct, explicit, learner-friendly vocabulary instruction that

incorporates multisensory activities (Carlyle & Katz, 2005; Gerlach, 2017). Such instruction activates their background knowledge, compares and contrasts L1 and L2 use of the words, analyses word morphology, provides the learners with examples, non-examples, and contextualized use of vocabulary, accompanied by numerous opportunities for practice and feedback (Haager & Osipova, 2017). These strategies support CLD students with disabilities' memory and attention and ultimately lead to the more effective acquisition of new vocabulary.

*Sentence level* approaches focus on syntax instruction with attention to grammatical structures that are particularly challenging for CLD students with disabilities. These include complex and compound sentences with embedded clauses, passive voice, and multidimensional challenges of nominalization ( a syntactic feature that creates longer and more complex syntactic structures and adds extra syllables when verbs turn into nouns) (Schleppegrell, 2009; Zisselsberger, 2016; Schall-Leckrone & Barron, 2018). Strategies and activities that have been shown to support CLD students with disabilities' in the acquisition, processing, and use of these syntactic structures include explicit modeling and analysis of grammar, comparison and contrast with L1 structures, expansion, and extension of students' oral and written responses, and guided practice in complex sentence construction, use of conjunctions, as well as practice transforming an active voice into passive voice constructions (Schall-Leckrone & Barron, 2018; Zhang-Wu, 2017). All of the above activities must be accompanied by careful analysis of the changes in meaning caused by the changes in syntactic structures.

*Text level* instruction focuses on supporting CLD students in the areas of reading comprehension and oral and written expression. Construction of oral and written texts is a skill rooted in linguistic and cultural practices. For this reason, CLD students with disabilities often lack background knowledge and discourse practice that are dominant culture-specific. Text level instruction focuses on making the text structure transparent through teacher and peer modeling, explicit and guided practice in oral and written text deconstruction, analysis, and composition. Strategies at this level include thinking maps, text chunking, visualization, think-alouds, summary construction, prediction and subsequent prediction evaluation, graphic organizers, color-coding of main ideas, supporting details, and counterarguments (Haager & Osipova, 2017). Further, text level instruction encompasses reading comprehension and written expression instruction recommended for CLD students with disabilities. These include direct, explicit instruction in text navigating approaches that teach CLD learners with disabilities recognize and use helpful text features (e.g., "chapter walks" that highlight diagrams, summary statements, discourse markers that signal contrast, sequence, cause and effect), explicit instruction and practice in genres, use of story grammar and essay frames (Dreher & Gray, 2009; Graham & MacArthur, 2013; Haager & Osipova, 2017). It is important to note that CLD learners with disabilities often struggle with processing and construction of texts as a whole due to the double challenge of unfamiliar text structures and difficulties with attention, memory, and organization. The explicit and highly visual nature of text-level supports and instruction, along with frequent comprehension checks, scaffold these challenges (Avalos & Secada, 2019; Hoffman & Zollman, 2016).

The discussion above suggests that combining culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and enhancing these methods with strategies designed to support struggling learners and students with disabilities magnifies the instructional power of both approaches and creates a pedagogy uniquely fit for meeting the needs of CLD learners with exceptional needs. At the same time, the range of strategies that we presented to briefly illustrate culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy presents a challenge for teacher preparation programs. Implementation of targeted intensive culturally and linguistically responsive interventions for CLD students with disabilities

requires an in-depth understanding of cultural, linguistic, and cognitive aspects of learning combined with the breadth of combined knowledge in content areas, TESOL, and special education that cannot be encompassed by the scope of a 1.5-2 year long credential program. In this context, we argue that the ongoing collaboration of educators specializing in different fields is the model necessary to break the cycle of failure for CLD students with disabilities.

### **Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs**

The current state of the field stipulates that teachers across disciplines continue to struggle to meet the needs of this diverse population. This indicates that qualitative changes are due in teacher preparation programs to better prepare educators to serve steadily increasing numbers of students in need of non-traditional, flexible approaches to teaching. We would like to conclude the chapter with a discussion of the following four key recommendations for improvement of quality of teacher preparation programs and the rationale behind them. Specifically, it calls for:

#### **I. Inter-departmental faculty collaboration (e.g., TESOL, Multiple and Single Subject, and Special Education credential and MA programs).**

Presently, the faculty in educator preparation programs dedicate themselves to specific and separate fields of TESOL, general or special education. The opportunities to share faculty expertise with mixed audiences of students pursuing the above-mentioned career paths are limited. This leads to training new generations of educators who are continuously unfamiliar with each other's teaching domains. At the same time, PK-12 students educated in inclusive classrooms are increasingly diverse in their linguistic and academic skills, background knowledge, and ability profiles. Such students require the attention of educators with expertise in multiple domains working collaboratively. Many of them are ELs educated in general and special education classrooms. The days of general and special education teachers, or teachers of ELs and teachers of monolingual students, dividing them into "my" and "your" students, have passed. It is critical that the contemporary teachers shift the paradigms to working with *all* students and consider them "our" students, indicating a shared responsibility for the success of the diverse learners. Research shows that teacher collaboration results in multiple benefits, including better teacher performance (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), higher student achievement (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008), and professional and personal development and growth of the educators involved (Weilbacher & Hurd, 2017). In this context, we would like to suggest three models for inter-departmental faculty collaboration as a way to improve teacher preparation in schools and colleges of education and to better prepare future educators for the professional demands and expectations.

- a. *Co-developed and co-taught courses.* Research shows that cross-disciplinary co-teaching by faculty experts from each discipline has positive impacts on all the constituents involved. While the students in the course benefit from "...the opportunity to learn from faculty with varied background and experience is a form of collaboration that strikes at the core of instructional practice" (York, Bacharach, Salk, Frank & Beniek, 2004, p. 91), the co-teaching faculty procure the experience of sharing the planning, teaching, and utilizing different strategies along with expanding their knowledge base about the subject (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2008; Weilbacher & Hurd, 2017). Cross-disciplinary co-teaching in higher education, especially in teacher preparation programs, is a great model for teacher candidates to experience and witness. The use of co-teaching practices between general and special educators and between general education and ESL teachers in PK-12 settings have been strongly advocated as a way to meet the learning needs of students who qualify for special

educational services (Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997; Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2008; Dieker, 2001) and English Learners (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010; Norton, 2016).

The favorable findings regarding co-teaching in higher education suggest that cross-disciplinary courses could be implemented by faculty of different departments. For instance, a number of constructs in education traverse the specialization areas of TESOL, general and special education. Among these are such constructs as *diversity* in cultures, languages, and abilities of learners, *academic language and literacy* taught across grade levels in general and special education classrooms, *principles of effective instruction* (including *CRP* discussed above), and other topics that faculty within the colleges of education could select as relevant for all educators. Shared courses in colleges of education that encompass these pertinent constructs for all educators have the potential to bring together faculty and students from different disciplines. Such courses would allow for sharing expertise across the programs. They would also serve as a model of co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing practices, which are a reality of current K-12 settings (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017). Additionally, these courses would offer teacher candidates the knowledge base they would need to make basic interdisciplinary connections in their future profession.

- b. *Collaborative Inter-Departmental Panel Presentations and Symposiums*. Another type of activity that can bring together faculty and students from different specializations is collaborative inter-departmental presentations for future educators majoring in different fields. In present day PK–12 grade settings, teachers of English as a Second Language, and special and general educators often come together as members of student study or student support teams (SSTs). These teams discuss how to best support students from diverse backgrounds who appear to struggle academically and identify the factors contributing to underachievement and/or behavior problems. Faculty in educator training programs could model such interactions. For example, a panel of faculty holding expertise in differing areas could present in various formats such as Question and Answer sessions to mock SST meetings where panelists and the audience examine a case of a student with multiple areas of needs and offer their perspectives on how to best assist the student. Current research underscores the existing disconnect between the critical importance of educator collaboration in school settings and the stark lack of inter-disciplinary collaborative models and experiences in higher education programs that prepare future educators (Flores, Osipova, Saeki, Fingon, and Evashkovsky, in press).
- c. *Collaborative Research and Collaborative Conferences*. Given the complex needs of current students in PK–12 settings and the infancy of inter-departmental faculty collaboration in co-designing and co-teaching curricula for educators pursuing varying specializations, collaborative research projects carried out by interdisciplinary faculty teams appear to be another venue for much-needed collaboration. As this article pointed out, determining the causes of academic and socio-behavioral difficulties experienced by diverse learners is not an easy task. More research is needed to identify the mechanisms for efficient, accurate, and timely identification of students with disabilities among CLD students and the progress monitoring of their skills and knowledge acquisition and development. A change from deficit paradigm to difference paradigm and recognizing diverse learners as students with unique assets warrants new interdisciplinary research that would explore how educators can integrate these students' distinctive capitals of knowledge into instruction and distinguish their strengths to build upon. Additional studies are needed to find effective systematic methods and strategies

to support, challenge, and motivate this population of students giving them the momentum to persevere, learn how to bridge the gaps in knowledge, and overcome challenges presented by the educational system.

Besides conducting interdisciplinary research, educator preparation programs could organize multidisciplinary conferences that would serve as a venue for sharing collaborative research and focus on issues that are relevant to all educators, reflecting the needs of CLD community of learners. Some topics for consideration are CRT and Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching (CLRT), school-family collaboration, trauma-informed instruction, overcoming adversity in education, and others. Similar to the multidisciplinary panels and symposiums discussed above, such conferences would model collaboration for educators and expand their knowledge beyond the scope of one discipline.

II. Teacher candidates' multi-level collaboration across credential areas, including collaboration in coursework, as well as sharing expertise while co-planning instruction and co-teaching CLD learners with exceptional needs during the fieldwork experiences.

Research shows that collaborative activities and experiences are infrequent in educator preparation programs (Drescher, 2017). This is especially true for inter-disciplinary collaboration (Flores et al., in press). Given the professional demands, the push for inclusion, and the complexity of the learning needs of CLD students at-risk for academic failure and those with disabilities, learning to teach, assess, and problem solve collaboratively should begin during the preservice training. In this context, three types of collaborative learning experiences for future educators seem to promise vital preparation for future collaboration in school settings.

a. *Infusing Coursework with In-depth Case Studies of CLD Students with Exceptional Needs.* One of the ways to bring teacher candidates together is to infuse preservice coursework with case studies of CLD students at risk for academic and/or social adjustment difficulties and those with disabilities. The case studies could present the developmental and academic history of a hypothetical student, the student's present levels of performance including strengths and challenges, classroom and state assessment results, family input, and perspectives and/or concerns of several educational professionals (i.e., TESOL, general and special education teachers, and or family input). Questions accompanying the case study could require preservice educators from different specializations to engage in collaborative problem solving utilizing and sharing their respective expertise. For example, interdisciplinary teams comprised of teacher candidates from TESOL, general and special education, and students from school psychology and educational administration programs could work together to design comprehensive approaches to formal and informal assessment and identification of CLD students with disabilities. They could further develop interventions and ways to monitor progress and discuss placement options and parent outreach. Such collaborative activities could take place in the inter-departmental courses that are co-taught by faculty from varying relevant specializations (discussed above in recommendation I.a.). In the absence of co-taught courses pre-service educators could conduct interviews with fellow students from other programs to get their perspectives regarding the issues presented in the case studies.

The across-discipline collaboration could be carried out in the form of online and/or mixed-reality forums that include students from multiple specializations. For instance, our college of education, along with 85 universities nationally and internationally, has been incorporating virtual reality simulations, owned by the technology company called Mursion, in teacher and other

professional preparation programs (e.g., school counseling, medical/nursing, etc.) (Kamhi-Stein, Lao, & Issagholian, 2020; Lao & Nazar, 2021). In mixed-reality classrooms or sessions, student educators teach a simulated class viewed on a monitor. The virtual students are played by avatars whose gestures and language are controlled by interactors (often actors). Some examples of the popular simulated scenarios used by our faculty and students include classroom management, content-based instructional strategies, I.E.P meetings, and job interviews. Either format of the case study centered collaborative activities will prepare preservice educators for future real-life multidisciplinary team collaboration.

- b. *Remedial and Enrichment Instruction and Assessment as a Service to the Community.* In order to provide future educators with authentic, collaborative teaching, co-planning, and assessment opportunities, interdepartmental early fieldwork experiences and lab practica could be organized as a part of clinical on-campus fieldwork practice. Preservice teams of TESOL, general and special educators could work together providing remedial and enrichment literacy instruction in the setting of university-based tutoring programs, weekend and evening classes for CLD youth and adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. Such programs could be established in partnership with local schools and operate as a service to the community. The educators in training, working under the guidance of cross-disciplinary faculty teams, could collaboratively conduct an informal in-depth assessment of students' language and literacy skills, consult with each other regarding conclusions and recommendations that they are making, co-plan and co-deliver instruction to small groups of students, and receive feedback from faculty supervisors throughout the range of instructional activities. Such early and ongoing collaborative experiences would better prepare future educators for the culminating activities in their final fieldwork.
  - c. *Clinical Fieldwork (Preservice Fieldwork Experiences).* Lastly, authentic, collaborative experiences could be organized for educators in preservice fieldwork settings. TESOL teacher preparation standards call for collaboration with the mainstream instructors (TESOL International Association, 2019) because of the increase in collaboration and co-teaching between ESL teachers and general education teachers in some K–12 schools (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010; Norton, 2016). Given the challenges inaccurate identification of CLD students with disabilities, the complexities of support that they require, and the prevalence of inclusive settings, we argue that collaboration experiences for preservice teachers should be extended to working with not only mainstream teachers but also with special education colleagues, administrators and counselors, and students' families. For example, fieldwork experiences could feature a) shadowing an EL who is at-risk for academic failure or an EL with a disability, b) collecting data on her progress and sharing it with the mainstream general and special education teachers, c) meeting and interviewing a family member to get a better understanding of academic history and family context, d) participating in an SST meeting, e) attending an IEP meeting, and f) working collaboratively with a special education teacher and/or counselor to develop a system of support for a student with dual needs: and EL with disabilities. Having clinical sites where the teacher candidates from different specializations are placed together would allow for richer and in-depth discussions of fieldwork experiences and for the practice of collaboration on sites with the guidance of the veteran teachers.
- III. Establishing university-school district partnerships with the aims of sharing research and practice expertise and developing meaningful contextualized collaborative fieldwork experiences that focus on teaching CLD students with exceptional needs.

University-school district partnerships are an excellent venue for improving the quality of teacher preparation programs while benefitting the community. This collaboration bridges the notorious gap between research and practice and provides invaluable opportunities for sharing the most cutting edge educational practices and relevant research finding, mentoring and supporting preservice and early career educators, with universities and school districts serving as mutual resources for each other. In the analysis of their current and rapidly expanding partnership with local K–12 school districts, Zetlin and colleagues (2019) suggest that developing the learning communities within schools benefits all the stakeholders involved in the process. Dr. Lao, one of the authors of this article, works as a faculty member participating in the project. In the narrative below, she explicates the partnership process, hoping that the model would benefit other teacher preparation programs.

*Ongoing partnerships.*

*In fall 2018, our college of education launched a newly approved undergraduate Accelerated Dual Credential (ADC) integrated teacher education program. This 4-year program culminates with a year of residency. Upon graduation, students receive their bachelor's degree with an elementary teaching credential along with a resource specialist (special education) credential. This newly approved program became an impetus to ascertain if we could develop a more systematic process for a) assigning preservice teacher education candidates to schools implementing inclusive practices and b) identifying and assigning skilled mentor teachers to candidates. With these goals in mind, we reached out and identified local district elementary schools that were interested in transforming to "inclusive" anchor sites (Zetlin et al., 2019). Working closely with the school principals and mentor teachers, the university team got to know each school's faculty. After becoming familiar with the schools' culture and faculty, we collaborated with each principal to select prospective mentors based on their skill level and interest in serving as a mentor teacher for an undergraduate preservice teacher candidate.*

The unique and robust nature of the partnership model that we began to describe above is based on at least three principles: a) the university team sought to establish an *ongoing* partnership with the school district and anchor schools, b) the higher education and K–12 education teams have a shared goal in mind (i.e., inclusion) that was valuable for both school and university, and c) given the goal for an ongoing partnership, the model is built upon the in-depth knowledge of stakeholders and is designed to evolve and improve with the growth of the partnership. Such partnerships, in contrast to one-shot professional development seminars and/or university-led research projects situated in school settings, hold a more significant promise for sustainability and long-term improvement. In the context of educating CLD students with disabilities, university-school partnerships structured as learning communities and focused on inclusion are particularly beneficial. They provide teacher candidates with access to veteran/expert educators teaching in TESOL, general, and special education.

*Teacher-to-Teacher Peer Coaching Models.* As educators, we sometimes forget our best asset—each other—in the promotion of our mutual learning and professional development. In her review of the literature on peer coaching among teachers, Hooker (2013) found that there were many benefits to this model, which included reciprocity (i.e., collaborating participants being able to give something back to each other), providing encouragement and support, and learning from each other. Depending on the focus of the teacher-to-teacher peer coaching, the model variations might involve the teachers engaging in the observation of each other's teaching; co-planning a lesson or



curriculum together; sharing narratives about one's teaching experiences; or conducting action research (Robbins, 1991; Shulman, 1991). Regardless of which form of peer coaching is adopted, the process fosters cognitive growth, develops trust among colleagues committed to sharing craft knowledge, and encourages educators to learn from one another (Robbins, 1991).

*Ongoing "Mutual" Professional Development.* Dr. Lao continues to describe the progression of her team's partnership with the local schools,

*"Our approach was to first learn about each school's staff by providing a series of interactive professional development workshops to all teachers. After an introductory session about the Accelerated Dual Credential (ADC), teachers in all three schools were asked to complete a needs assessment survey to assess their sense of self-efficacy and skills when supporting students with disabilities (SWD) in the general education classroom. The survey also gauged their familiarity with co-teaching practices, Universal Design for Learning, Positive Behavior Supports, IEP accommodations, utilizing instructional assistants to support student learning, and support for English Learners. Data indicated that in two schools, while over 80% of the teachers felt they'd received adequate or very adequate support to effectively instruct SWD, less than half felt they were only mildly successful with their current instructional model for meeting academic and socioemotional needs. In the third school, only 40% felt they'd received adequate support to effectively instruct SWD, and less than half felt confident with their instructional model for meeting academic and socioemotional needs. In terms of professional development needs, teachers at all three schools indicated a need for strategies to address disruptive behavior and strategies to support SWDs' access to the curriculum including how to adapt and modify curriculum and information about Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Zetlin et al., 2019). Presenting and sharing the data with the principals and teachers, we asked what areas they would like further information. With mutual agreement, professional developments would then follow with prospective mentors the following year to further develop their coaching and mentor skills as Resident Mentors."*

### **Concluding Remarks**

As educators sharing craft knowledge of the profession, we hope the information presented in this chapter will inform and benefit other educators who are seeking ways to better understand and assist our most vulnerable student population in schools—culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with exceptional needs. Grounding our pedagogical and assessment recommendations in the current state of the field, we believe that promising pedagogical approaches involving effective instruction and social supports would be culturally and linguistically responsive instruction which combines the framework of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) with thorough attention to students' language and literacy development as outlined in the chapter. An equitable assessment would consist of comprehensive assessments that involve formal and informal assessment measures. Since assisting the needs of (CLD) students with exceptional needs requires a conglomerate of educators with specialization in English, TESOL, and Special Education, teachers, no longer can work in silos. Implementation of targeted intensive culturally and linguistically responsive interventions for CLD students with disabilities requires an in-depth understanding of cultural, linguistic, and cognitive aspects of learning combined with the breadth of combined knowledge in content areas, TESOL, and special education that cannot be encompassed by the scope of 1.5-2 year-long credential programs. In this

context, we argue that the ongoing collaboration of educators specializing in different fields is the model necessary to break the cycle of failure for CLD students with disabilities.

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