

English Language Learners in Special Education: Disproportionality and other Related Issues

by

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2:00 EDT

Questions - Housekeeping

- ▶ Please make sure to enter any question you may have as we move along this presentation. We encourage your participation and we would like to address any specific issues you might be facing.
- ▶ If there is a question that we feel is relevant to the whole group, we will address in our presentation. If not we will try to respond individually, electronically, as we move along.

Part I

- ▶ Disproportionate Representation
 - What does it mean?
 - Why are we re-visiting the same issue over and over and over again?
 - How is the current reform movement (NCLB, IDEIA) impacting student outcomes

Disproportionality

- ▶ According to IDEIA, states must work to *prevent the inappropriate overidentification or disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of children as children with disabilities, including children with disabilities with a particular impairment*

*Source: U.S. Department of Education -- Office of Special Education Programs
Disproportionality and Overidentification – 2/2/07*

English Language Learners (ELLs)

- ▶ ELLs have a long history of inappropriate educational placement. Most notable is the misidentification (over- or under-identification) of ELLs as having learning disabilities, mental retardation, speech-language impairments, and/or behavior disorders/emotional disturbance.

Findings of the Center on Education Policy

- ▶ Positive effects of NCLB
 - Emphasis on raising achievement
 - Requires accountability for all students
 - Provides help for schools needing it
 - Puts greater attention on teacher quality
- ▶ Negative effects of NCLB
 - SPED sub group is unworkable
 - Lack of state capacity to help districts
 - Insufficient funding to carry out the law
 - Potential negative side effects including high stress on teachers and poor staff morale in some schools

Specific Problem Areas

- ▶ Philosophical conflict
 - IDEIA focuses on unique needs of each child (individualization is key)
 - NCLB focuses on achievement of all kids
 - Is the IEP being pushed aside by the high stakes assessment?

Legal Benefits (conflicts?)

- ▶ NCLB does not provide legal benefits (a parent cannot sue if a child is not taught by a highly qualified teacher)
- ▶ IDEIA does provide legal benefits (a parent can sue if a child's needs are not being met)

Why?

- ▶ How does disproportionality happen?

We need to look at:

teaching effectiveness (highly qualified?)

quality of ESL program

assessment

measuring of student progress

professionals' understanding of

culture and language

Characteristics that students with mild disabilities and ELLs may have in common:

- difficulties processing or producing language
- difficulty attending to task
- difficulty following directions
- incorrect responses to questions
- unexpected or inappropriate social or emotional responses or behaviors
- difficulty with expressive or receptive language
- difficulties with perception
- difficulty with memory
- poor academic performance → achievement gap

Part II

► Culturally Responsive Teaching

- Is it necessary?
- Once a child has been identified as having a special need, must we address the learning gaps, social (self-help), emotional considerations as identified on the IEP, and not the language and culture of the child?

Six characteristics that define the Culturally Responsive Teacher (Villegas & Lucas, 2002)

- ▶ Socio-cultural consciousness (i.e., understanding that people's ways of thinking behaving, and being deeply influenced by such factors as race, ethnicity, social class, and language)
- ▶ An affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds (i.e., students who differ from the dominant culture)
- ▶ The commitment and skills to act as agents of change (i.e., recognition that schools have served to maintain social inequities and the willingness to take action to change this)


Six characteristics of CRT (continued)

- ▶ Constructivist views of learning (i.e., use and build on learners' prior knowledge and beliefs)
- ▶ Learned knowledge about their students (i.e., students' backgrounds, experiences, lives, communities)
- ▶ Culturally responsive teaching practices (i.e., involving all students in construction of knowledge, building on students' personal and cultural strengths, teaching students to examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives, making classroom cultures inclusive of all students).

CRT and Possible Implications for Teacher Preparation programs

Realities we face in El Paso:

- ▶ We may be assuming that students graduating from our programs have a deep understanding of what it means to be Culturally Responsive Teachers because most of our teachers come from our communities and live in a bilingual/bicultural setting.
- ▶ Findings of current research efforts indicate that reflection is not reported as an active and ongoing practice.
- ▶ Teachers view themselves as technicians vs. agents of change.
- ▶ There exists a “culture called special education. Diversity is understood as a placement issue addressing educational needs solved by including students in general education programs.
- ▶ Issues focus on special education implementation practices (i.e., lack of support from general education teachers, lack of administrative support, conformity in the way things are done, administrators view special education as a solution to lower performing students on high-stake tests)

The background is a dark blue-grey color with a subtle pattern of light grey topographic map lines. In the lower-left corner, there is a faint, stylized compass rose with a needle pointing towards the top-left. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

We can't talk about CRT without
addressing the Parental/family
Perspectives – what we continue to
hear

We can't talk about CRT without addressing the Parental/family Perspectives – what we continue to hear

- ▶ CLDE Parents continue to sign paperwork giving consent to asses for special education without really understanding what it is.
- ▶ There is a misunderstanding or lack of communication regarding the IEP meeting – parents thought they were going to the school for an informal meeting with the teacher.
- ▶ In one case a change of educational placement from resource to self-contained was made without a meeting. Parent was told the purpose was to provide more support. Teachers said it was because of larger class sizes in middle school.

How do parents know their Rights:

- ▶ They know they are entitled to an interpreter, but one was not always provided.
- ▶ Even when an interpreter is provided, the parents sometimes need explanation, not just a direct translation of educational jargon.
- ▶ They know they can dispute or disagree with a decision, but they don't know where to go for information or support.

How do Parents Understand Special Education/LD?

- Research conducted in both US and Mexico
 - Understood there was a problem with academic achievement.
 - Disability is defined by the observation of specific behaviors.
 - The term of LD is broadly defined and not easily understood by teachers and parents (in both Mexico and the U.S.).
 - The purpose of special education is to provide “extra help.”
 - Special education in the U.S. is different than in the home country (more low incidence disabilities).

Goals For Their Children

- ▶ Do better than parents did in school/complete more years of schooling.
- ▶ Go on to college and a career.

Concerns/Themes

- ▶ Mothers were concerned about success in school.
- ▶ Agreed to services suggested by the school.
- ▶ Special education services placed a social stigma, however, they did not openly question the services, and believed that they were being offered in the best interest of the child.
- ▶ Parents (Mothers) seemed to maintain preconceived notions about respecting teachers as authorities.
- ▶ Teachers often overlooked the daily efforts and interest that parents took to endure that their children attended school and were prepared and ready. They didn't seem concerned about the relationship between home/family support and success in school.
- ▶ In some cases secretaries served as gatekeepers, denying parents access to teachers and principals.

How Parents Help Their Children

- ▶ Helped in homework-related tasks (but were concerned about their ability to help with more difficult homework).
- ▶ Provided “Consejos” advice that they thought would support them making progress in school
- ▶ Did not involve strategies that would help them assess academic information.
- ▶ Homework was very important as a way of measuring school progress.
- ▶ The “lack” of notification was interpreted as “Everything is alright.” OR led to a feeling of isolation, exclusion.

Additional thoughts/comments from parents:

- ▶ “Sometimes I feel apart. I don’t know if it is because I am Portuguese.”
- ▶ “They called me the last week of school and told me that she would be transferred to [another school].”
- ▶ “When there were school functions, I would go to school and I would ask the teachers how she was doing, but I was never called for a meeting. I feel that I needed to know more. There was no one to speak to me in Portuguese to tell me anything. If I had to go there, I had to take a sister-in-law or a friend to translate. I have no complaints about the teachers. They were wonderful.”

Implications:

- ▶ Clarification of the term “LD” needs to be established. (see NASP link for LD identification)
- ▶ Parents need clear examples as to what implications a LD label means and how they can help. When translations are involved the complexity of the definition might be lost.
- ▶ Homework is important .
- ▶ Parents rely on informal networks (information brokers) to understand the unwritten rules that regulate both special and general education.

Part III – Best Practices

- ▶ So what do we do now in terms of:
 - Assessment
 - Classroom Instruction
 - Parent Involvement
 - Self reflection

Progress Monitoring and Assessment

▶ Classroom Teacher

- Analytic Teaching
- Curriculum Based measurement
- Language Samples/Journaling
- Work Sample Analysis
- Task Analysis
- Running Records

▶ School Psychologist/ educational diagnostician

- Dynamic Assessment
- Language Sampling
- Observations in Different Settings
- Work Sample Analysis
- Need to Analyze within Group Differences
- Student's Cultural Background is Represented in the Norm Sample

Adapted from: Hoover, J.J., Patton, J.R., Hresko, W., & Hammill, D.D. (In preparation). Prereferral Assessment Inventory. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.- Monarch Presentation 2006, Baca

RTI as a Means of Reducing Inappropriate Referrals

▶ Difference v. Disability

- In order to effectively differentiate between learning differences and learning disabilities cultural and linguistic factors must be addressed throughout the RTI program (Tharp, 1997, Hoover and Baca, 2001)

▶ Reducing Biased Decision Making

- According to Baca and Clark (1992)
 - ▶ 25% of bias is found in the assessment instruments
 - ▶ 75% in the interpretation and uses of assessment results

Effective ELL Programs

Are based on high standards and linked to the general education curriculum.

Provide instruction that:

- ▶ is comprehensible yet challenging (and moves from context-embedded/cognitively undemanding tasks to context-reduced/cognitively demanding tasks – see handout)
- ▶ builds upon prior knowledge and experience.
- ▶ reflects and includes the cultural and social experiences of students.
- ▶ allows for dialogue and social interaction as building blocks for language development and learning.

Classroom Factors

- ▶ Linguistic Competence
- ▶ Contextualized Learners
- ▶ Joint Productivity
- ▶ Instructional Conversation
- ▶ Challenging Curriculum

CREDE, Tharp, 1997

Parent/Family Involvement

- ▶ Explain terminology and procedures in their own language in a non threatening environment (the initial IEP meeting is **not** the place for explanation of special education jargon)
- ▶ Are parents of a student with a special need invited to be a part of school activities (or do they have to spend their time advocating and fighting for their child's well being)?
- ▶ Are you aware of the family dynamics and are there other family members that can help provide information about the child? Are they invited to participate in the educational process?
- ▶ Do you lean forward to listen to their hopes, dreams, and expectations for their child, or do you (we) bend over backwards and provide services that the parent does not want nor understand (borrowed from the title of an article written by Beth Harry)
- ▶ How do we help parents/family learn about the "hidden curriculum" in schools? Do we provide them with navigational tools? (i.e., names of school & district contacts, visual aids such a organizational charts, clear classroom expectations, procedural information)

Questions we need to ask ourselves:

- ▶ What do the schools do to provide information and explanations to parents/families?
- ▶ What kinds of support networks are available to parents/families? How do they learn about these networks?
- ▶ Do we treat parents/families differently when they speak a language other than English? Do we assume they will not dispute educational decisions?
- ▶ Is special education for students who need “extra help?” If not, how do we explain that to parents who speak a language other than English?

Self Reflection

- ▶ Don't assume you "know" your students even though you are one of "them" Are you aware of your own personal biases, values, and beliefs? How might these be reflected in daily interactions with students (i.e., gender, culture, family, immigration status, military status)
- ▶ Take time to step away from the curricular pressures to reflect on how you are addressing the cultural and emotional aspects of the students in your classroom
- ▶ Is your classroom a "McDonald's" classroom? You do want your classroom to be a window to the world, but is the diversity the students bring with them reflected in daily practice? (Whether a SPED or general education class)
- ▶ How do you measure student success?

Your/our Challenge

- ▶ How can we implement culturally responsive practices within the current reform movement that constricts:
 - Curricular decision making (standardization)
 - High stakes accountability for all students
 - Drives us to cover content quickly

Websites

- ▶ www.alliance.brown.edu/tdl/
- ▶ crede.berkeley.edu/index.html
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- ▶ [http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/positionpapers/SLDPosition 2007.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/positionpapers/SLDPosition_2007.pdf)

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TEACHING DIVERSE LEARNERS

EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE FOR ALL SEARCH

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New! Annual Review of Research: The **fourth** in a series of reviews of research related to equity and diversity has been released. *Approaches to Writing Instruction for Adolescent English Language Learners* is now available to download:

- [Approaches to Writing Instruction for Adolescent English Language Learners: A Discussion of Recent Research and Practice Literature in Relation to Nationwide Standards on Writing](#)

[Past reviews of research >](#)

Other New Publications:

- [Leading With Diversity: Cultural Competencies for Teacher Preparation and Professional Development](#)
- [The Teacher's Guide to Diversity: Building a Knowledge Base](#)

[Elementary Literacy](#) - Discusses the literacy challenges that are specific to English language learners and identifies effective teaching strategies for scaffolding oral language, reading, and writing development.

[Teaching & Learning Strategies](#) - Addresses practical applications for the areas of Culturally Responsive Teaching, Sheltered English Instruction, and Language Support for Students in the Home and in School.

[Assessment](#) - Explores three separate aspects of assessment for English language learners: Initial Assessment, Ongoing Assessment, and High-Stakes Testing. Each of these areas is

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CREDE 2006 Seminar

Thirty researchers and teacher educators convened in Berkeley, California to attend a two day seminar entitled "Transforming Pedagogy at the Tertiary Level: Sharing and Planning" hosted by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence of the Graduate School of Education (CREDE) at the University of California, Berkeley April 5-6, 2006. The Seminar's purpose was to bring together teacher educators from many universities that are interested in improving their own teaching and using the *Standards for Effective Pedagogy* (developed by CREDE) as their guiding pedagogical system.



The Seminar was facilitated by Roland Tharp, founder and director of CREDE. The first day provided participants with an overview of the successes, challenges and central issues pertaining to use of the *Standards* as well as presentations on three programmatic projects based on the *Standards* and views on the directions related work is taking. The presentations explored pedagogical reform as practiced by a variety of individual professors in all kinds of teacher preparation settings. After lunch, the participants were given an opportunity to reflect on the adventure of adopting a different way of teaching pre-service teachers in higher education. In these sessions, participants posed questions, offered suggestions, expressed concerns, and outlined potential pitfalls for each project.

On the second day participants learned about the current state of three programmatic projects based on the *Standards for Effective Pedagogy* - at the University of California, Berkeley/California State University, Stanislaus; the University of Memphis; and the nation of Greenland. Participants also discussed how the 'seminar' could continue and grow into a multi-university collaborative.



Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy

- [1. Joint Productive Activity](#)
- [2. Language and Literacy Development](#)
- [3. Contextualization/Making Meaning](#)
- [4. Challenging Activities](#)
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The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems

The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCREST), a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Special Educations Programs, provides technical assistance and professional development to close the achievement gap between students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their peers, and reduce inappropriate referrals to special education.



...inclusive ways of knowing and living offer us the only true way to emancipate ourselves from the divisions that limit our minds and imaginations.

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When a butterfly flutters its wings in one part of the world, it can eventually cause a wave in another...

- Adapted from Edward Lorenz and Chaos Theory



The National Technical Assistance Center for Personnel Preparation in Special Education at Minority Institutions of Higher Education



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NASP Position Statement on Identification of Students With Specific Learning Disabilities

Ongoing research on specific learning disabilities (SLD) is reshaping our understanding of children with this disability and the laws and regulations concerning how school psychologists and other team members identify them. Approximately 2.9 million children in the United States receive special education services with SLD as their designated primary disability category (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). This represents over 5.5 percent of the school-age population, and approximately one-half of all children receiving special education services. Identification and treatment of children with specific learning disabilities has been, and continues to be, the subject of considerable interest. Issues of particular current concern include (1) the high prevalence of learning disabilities; (2) variability in identification rates and eligibility procedures across school districts and across states; (3) insufficient emphasis on prevention, early identification of, and intervention for learning problems; (4) questionable validity and educational relevance of methods and practices used for SLD

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