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Fueling disproportionality of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education: Implications for teacher preparation programs

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Fueling disproportionality of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education:
Implications for teacher preparation programs

Racial disparities continue to exist due to, in large part, color-blind ideologies and lack of culturally responsive pedagogy (Artiles, 2009; Gay, 2013; Lopez, 2003). According to Artiles (2009), a historical intersection between race and within our educational context continues to exist, especially in the context of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities. The historical intersection between race and ability have been often explored but forgotten within our educational context. In a normative and standardized society, the lack of cultural sustainability within the educational system and the focus on individualism produce a discourse in the educational patterns for CLD populations. Specifically, Hispanic/Latino migrant populations continue to encounter separatism and lack of the appropriate support in this system and often, leading to disproportionality in special education (de Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006).

Based on the cultural-historical framework proposed by Artiles (2009) the paper will discuss racial and cultural clashes with current practices in teacher education that continue fueling the disproportionate representation of CLD students in the special education system, especially those whose primary language is not English. Culturally responsive pedagogies and the implications of Response to Intervention in teacher preparation programs will play a key role in the discussion.

Increase in Diversity and Constant Disproportionality

The increasing number of the Latino population in the United States has brought different challenges to the education framework. More than 50 million people compose the Hispanic/Latino category according to the U. S. Census Bureau (2010). Overall, around 34% of

the population in the United States comes from a culturally diverse background (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). After the landmark decision of *Brown versus the Board of Education* in 1954, students of diverse backgrounds could no longer be segregated in public schools (Louis, 2005). This decision improved the quality of education for most students from diverse backgrounds.

Almost six decades later, the challenges of providing an appropriate education for all culturally diverse students have increased, especially in the assessment, identification and support of culturally and linguistically students with special needs. The authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004) provides support for all students with disabilities, although this support is often not enough for culturally and linguistically students with disabilities. Although most recent data shows a decline of CLD students in certain disability categories, the disproportionate representation of Latino students in special education is evident. For example, Hispanic/Latino migrant populations continue to encounter separatism and lack of the appropriate support in this system and often, leading to disproportionality in categories such as learning disability (de Valenzuela et al., 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics show that 43.6 % of Latinos with disabilities, are labeled with a learning disability, compared to only 32.5% of White/Caucasian students with the same label and above the total average of 36% for this same disability category (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Teacher Shortage: Another Challenge

According to research, a shortage of special education teachers and bilingual or CLD special education teachers has been one of the top concerns in the field of special education for the past few decades (McCray & Garcia, 2002; Boe, 2012). Many services cannot be provided to students who have been identified as having a disability and whom are linguistically or culturally

diverse learners due to this shortage. The growth of the CLD population in this country has also impacted other fields such as the speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy and such. Implications for the appropriate training and preparation for these professionals is key to addressing the disproportionality of CLD students in special education.

A Cultural-Historical Framework for Future Research: A Possible Solution?

The cultural-historical framework best explained by Artiles (2009) focuses on the micro, rather than the macro of disproportionality. Specifically, the situations that happen within (the micro) one classroom, a teacher education program, or even a sole community, rather than focusing on what has been done and “researched” in a macro environment with systems, overall schools, and even educational models that could potentially alleviate this issue.

Within this framework, teacher preparation programs could dedicate more time to prepare more CLD teachers and culturally responsive teachers in all fields of education in order to support the needs of this fast growing population. In addition, research should focus in the evaluation of the micro-systems: a) classrooms and schools and their culturally responsive practices (Gay, 2002), b) culturally responsive practices in teacher preparation programs (Gay, 2002; Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Richards, 2006), c) school policies, assessments, and RTI/pre-referral frameworks (Klinger & Edwards, 2006; Bennet, 2012; Castro, 2010), and d) in-service teacher practices as they relate to CLD students.

To add to these possible solutions, the Response to Intervention (RTI) model or framework has been used as an initiative to decrease the disproportionality of CLD students in special education (NCCREST, 2005). Although the research and practice of this model is often misinterpreted or misused, especially those in teacher preparation programs (Barrio & Combes, 2014; Barrio, Lindo, Combes, & Hovey, 2015), the National Center for Culturally Responsive

Educational Systems (NCCREST, 2005) Framework encourages us to teach and practice this model incorporating culturally responsive practices, often left out by many of the models provided in the research or training.

Remaining Questions and Challenges Ahead.

As we view, incorporate, and construct a framework proposed by Artiles (2009) to enhance the supports and educational access for CLD students with or without disabilities, questions for teacher and teacher educators still remain: What has been the historical practices and how have our positionalities changed over the past few decades? In this post-civil rights era, are color-blindness and culture-blindness the most common lenses in most teacher education programs? What are possible solutions to address the disproportionality of CLD students in special education through teacher preparation programs (i.e., general, special, and bilingual/ESL education)?

Implications for the Field and Future Research

The concerns expressed by many researchers and authors throughout the past few decades about the appropriate education for CLD students with disabilities continues to thrust in today's conversations, research, and practice. Almost two decades ago, Trent and Artiles (1998) challenged teachers and training programs to expand on inquires of best practice and continue to provide more research on models that can be developed and replicated for a more diverse special education. As the conversation in practice and research continues regarding the disproportionality of CLD students in special education, it is imperative that solutions or ideas are presented. A historical perspective of disproportionality in special education provides the foundation to move forward in the exploration of innovative practices and research. Frameworks

such as the one proposed by Artiles (2009) focusing on a cultural-historical framework could provide promising solutions.

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