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## Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Special Education: Teacher and Outcome Proficiency Self-Rating Form Ensuring Assessment Competency

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Messiah College  
The Graduate School

CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE SPECIAL EDUCATION:  
TEACHER SELF-RATING FORM ENSURING ASSESSMENT COMPETENCY AND  
OUTCOME PROFICIENCY

A Master's Paper in

Special Education

by

Tyler Edward Herman

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of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Education in Special Education

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We approve the Master's Paper of Tyler Edward Herman.

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## ABSTRACT

This Master's project investigated current research literature for prevailing prereferral and referral processes of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students to special education evaluation. To that end, this Master's project sought to strengthen the validity of the referral process for CLD students by creating a self-rating form to guide teachers in accurately differentiating CLD students who are in need of receiving special education services from those who do not need such services. The self-rating form is founded on three competencies of multicultural teacher efficacy and requires teachers to reflect on classroom-level, team collaboration, prereferral, and referral practices. Limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Overview**

This chapter provides an overview of a research-based project that explored the perceptions, backgrounds, and experiences of special education teachers responsible for instructing culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in public education settings. The project focuses, specifically, on teachers' capacity to justifiably refer CLD students for evaluation for special education services. Although this is a research-based project, I found it appropriate to begin with a narrative of how I became interested in CLD students and their over-representation in receiving special education. This chapter then goes on to contextualize the problem, present the purpose of this project, and outline the methodology used to address the problem. It also provides an overview of some of the limitations inherent in this project. The chapter ends with a list of definition of terms that are relevant to the topic and common to special education and language programs, in general.

#### **Personal Narrative**

One salient life event compelled me to pursue the topic of ensuring a culturally and linguistically responsive referral process. After obtaining my position as an itinerant learning support teacher at a public school in Pennsylvania, with a student population that experiences poverty (e.g., 100% of students receive free and reduced lunch), is transient (e.g., some move in and out of the district, even in and out of the United States, multiple times per school year), and identifies as racial and ethnic minorities (e.g., about 70% identify as Hispanic), my caseload typically consisted of about one-third of English language learners (ELLs) eligible for special education services. Thus, I supported about 12 students per school year who identify as CLD

and receive special education services. As I felt inadequate to support my students' concurrent needs of language and disability, I opted to take a graduate course in second language acquisition while completing my Master's of Education in special education at Messiah College. Through my research in this program, as well as my personal experience as a public educator, I discovered the insufficient referral process that results in a disproportionate number of CLD students receiving special education services.

In conjunction with this event, my critical outlook on the public education system drives my research. The public education system quickly labels students with differences in order to "help" them. For example, students presenting learning difficulties require response to intervention (RTI) and, potentially, adaptations to make learning more accessible to the students. Likewise, students presenting language difficulties require English as a second language (ESL) programming in order to provide English language acquisition while making academic content accessible with language support. Although school psychologists label and track students for special education services and scores from the Assessing Comprehension Communication English State to State (ACCESS) tests label and track students for ESL programming, this Master's project focuses on the problem of premature referrals for evaluation for special education services by teachers of CLD students. Some of these students present both learning and language difficulties. The prematurity of referrals is possibly due to the lack of learning and understanding by teachers, teachers being undertrained or underqualified in addressing concurrent difficulties in language and learning, and teachers lacking multicultural or intercultural competence. This project addresses these concerns with a Christian framework in mind.

The great Judeo-Christian tradition of justice—the right ordering of the world—is at the

forefront of appropriately addressing CLD students' needs. As God dealt with Israel, he gave them the laws of the Old Testament to show humanity once again how to properly care for and order the world in which they lived. The author of Deuteronomy declares, "[God] executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:18). If humans were ordering the world, as they should have been, these people would have had access to food and clothing. Humans, however, were not fulfilling their commission, thus demonstrating that human systems often oppress others and wrongly ordering them as somehow lower beings. Jesus reversed this wrongly created order on the cross, where he became king. And now, as his people, Christians must return to God's original commission for humanity to order the world appropriately.

Therefore, in reflecting upon this topic, I realize the system in place for addressing CLD students' needs represents a disordering, or a lack of care for ordering, of God's intended order. That is, rather than walking alongside CLD students to determine their best opportunity for growth within the public education system, the system has uncritically and conveniently tossed them in where it already has room for them, thus limiting their potential for growth. In this paper, while referring to Mark 10:42-44, I hope to call humanity back to its task, however difficult it may be, of ordering the educational system in a way that is fair to the students it serves rather than in a way that is easy for those occupying privileged positions within it.

### **Contextualizing the Problem**

An over-representation of ELLs referred to and receiving special education services increasingly exists (Hoover & Erickson, 2015; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). This is due, in part, to contrasting educational experiences and expectations between collectivist- and individualistic-learning approaches (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014) and lower- and middle-class differences (Ortiz,



n.d.). With ELLs often times belonging to the former situations (e.g., schools in their native countries using collectivist-learning approaches and immigrating into the lower socioeconomic class of American society) and public education settings often times belonging to the latter situations (e.g., employing individualist-learning approaches and embodying middle socioeconomic class ideals), the discrepancy leads to misidentification of, misplacement of, and disservice to ELLs. Further, these cultural differences are inextricable from the language differences that exist between ELLs and public education academics. After all, “common attitudes, beliefs, and values are reflected in the way members of the group use language...” (Kramsch, 1998, p. 6). Culture and language cannot be separated and both affect students’ success as both an ELL and a student receiving special education; therefore, throughout this paper these students will be referred to as culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students.

According to IDEA (2004), opportunity is at the core of the right to education. Students—all students—are entitled to a free and appropriate public education in the United States. Accordingly, injustice occurs when dispositional barriers such as culture, language, and ability are inadequately addressed in order to equalize that opportunity. Seemingly, this injustice extends worldwide for CLD students who are referred to special education services (UNESCO, 2012). Due to incongruence between school standards and immigrated students’ educational expectations, teachers worldwide view CLD students differently and place them in a disadvantaged position through the referral process to receive special education services. Research shows that CLD students disproportionately represent those referred to and receiving special education services (Chu, 2011; Fernandez & Inserra, 2013; Gravios & Rosenfield, 2006; Hoover & Erickson, 2015; Lanfranchi, 2014; Ortiz, n.d.). That is, while about 10% of all students identify as CLD in the United States’ public education system, about 8% of students

receiving special education are also CLD (More, Spies, Morgan, & Baker, 2016).

### **Purpose of the Project: A Call for Action**

The misperception of CLD students with qualifying special education disability categories may derive from teachers confusing diversity with disability. Consequently, “the validity of the referral process has been a major concern” in public education in the United States (Chu, 2011, p. 3). To that end, the purpose of this Master’s project was to strengthen the validity of the referral process for CLD students. Multicultural and intercultural competence is the foundation to appropriately resolving the inherently discriminatory over-representation of CLD students receiving special education services. This Master’s project, therefore, aimed to enhance the referral process by creating a self-rating form to guide teachers in differentiating CLD students who are in need of receiving special education services from those who do not need such services. This Master’s project also enables educational stakeholders to employ a culturally and linguistically responsive referral process by following the components of the self-rating form in order to avoid inaccurate referrals (e.g., focusing on personal differences for lack of learning), provide equal opportunity and access to a free and appropriate public education for all students, and employ overall best-practices based on evidence- and research-based interventions.

Considering multiple levels of the problem, rather than promoting blaming-the-victim initiatives better addresses the needs of these students. This is important to public education, special education, and society. In his book, *Blaming the Victim*, Ryan (1971) defines blaming-the-victim as ignoring larger contributing factors and focusing on personal characteristics. One of the larger contributing factors to the over-representation of CLD students referred to and receiving special education services may be an ineffective referral process. Educational stakeholders, then, should employ a culturally and linguistically responsive referral process in

order to avoid inaccuracy in labeling (e.g., focusing on personal differences for lack of learning) to ensure equal opportunity and access for all students to a free and appropriate public education, regardless of dispositional factors. “These myriad differences make diversity a way of life rather than a problem to be solved or fixed by casting the other as deficient” (Dray & Wisneski, 2011, p. 28).

### **Methodology**

To strengthen the validity of the referral process for CLD students, I created a self-rating form for teachers to affirm their competence in making culturally and linguistically responsive decisions as to whether or not to refer CLD students to the school psychologist for evaluation. In order to create the self-rating form, I reviewed multiple prereferral and referral processes found in the literature to more accurately identify and synthesize those processes that embody three competencies of teacher multicultural efficacy:

- (a) Teacher Awareness: an awareness of their personal beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills;
- (b) Teacher Understanding: an understanding of their personal disposition and its interaction with students’ worldview; and
- (c) Teacher Ability: an ability to provide ethically and culturally relevant pedagogy with appropriate interventionse (Chu, 2011).

These underlying competencies engender a multistep process whereby educators can more effectively and accurately refer CLD students for special education services without mistaking difference for disability (Chu, 2011; Fernandez & Inserra, 2013; Orosco & O’Connor, 2014; Ortiz, n.d.).

### **Limitations**

The outcome of this Master's project was to ensure that there will be less of an over-representation of CLD students referred to and receiving special education services and that effective, culturally and linguistically responsive referral processes will be the future in public education. However, it should be noted that the need for the self-rating form derived from a perspective built upon experience in one urban school district in Pennsylvania and, therefore, is not necessarily reflective of the prereferral and referral processes used across all school districts in the United States. Within this perspective, CLD students predominately reflect Hispanic, Spanish-speaking students immigrating to the United States and attending English-speaking schools. This paper, nonetheless, acknowledges the diversity inherent in the term *CLD students* and suggests that the self-rating form will prove beneficial regardless of the specific characteristics of CLD students at various school districts. Finally, this paper seems to suggest minimizing the number of referrals for evaluation for special education services, which appears to contradict IDEA's (2004) Child-Find duty. The mismatch between this paper and IDEA (2004) should not be discounted and Child-Find initiatives must continue in order to service all students eligible for special education and related services. After all, the use of culturally and linguistically responsive referral processes aligns with IDEA's (2004) nondiscriminatory testing provision.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. **English as a Second Language (ESL):** those settings are those that foster English language acquisition in English-speaking countries, such as the United States (Dormer, 2011). In this paper, the term *ESL* refers to English acquisition programs in public education settings in the United States. Typically, immigrant students who natively speak a language other than English are tested and placed in these programs.

2. **English language learners (ELLs):** students of English, particularly in ESL contexts (Dormer, 2011). In this paper, the term *ELLs* refers to students in ESL programs in public education settings across the United States. These students are typically those being assessed and placed in ESL programs.

3. **The Assessing Comprehension Communication English State to State (ACCESS) test:** a standardized placement test taken annually by ELLs in ESL programs (ACCESS for ELLs, n.d.). Students complete the assessment to determine ESL levels or potentially exiting from ESL programming.

4. **Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD):** CLD students are also referred to in the literature as ELLs, students with limited English proficiency, native speakers of a language other than English, students enrolled in ESL programming, and so forth (Scott, Boynton Hauerwas, & Brown, 2014). In this paper, the term *CLD students* refers to a range of diversity, both culturally and linguistically, that students across the United States embody.

5. **Response to Intervention (RTI):** an early intervention approach that integrates a multitier, preventative instructional system that enhances data-driven decision-making. An RTI model can inform the areas of prereferral, referral, assessment, and individualized education plan (IEP) development (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008).

## Chapter 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This Master's project aimed to enhance the special education prereferral and referral processes by creating a self-rating form based on the research literature to guide teachers in differentiating CLD students who are in need of receiving special education services from those who do not need such services. The self-rating form enabled teachers to employ culturally and linguistically responsive prereferral and referral processes and avoid inaccurate referrals based on evidence- and research-based interventions. Moreover, the self-rating form embodies three competencies of teacher multicultural efficacy based on Chu's (2011) research.

Bandura's efficacy theory states that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, physiological and emotional status, and social persuasion (Chu, 2011). Therefore, the knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and so forth that teachers demonstrate in behavior toward their CLD students determines their multicultural efficacy—and their perception of it—within their classrooms. Chu (2011) argues that, as a result, “teachers must organize their classrooms in ways that take into account the students' cultural background, language, learning styles, values, and knowledge they encounter at home within their community” (p. 4). This reorientation increases teachers' multicultural efficacy. To evaluate this aim, Chu (2011) presents three competencies of multicultural teacher efficacy that this paper uses as criteria for teachers during culturally and linguistically responsive prereferral and referral processes of CLD students to evaluation for special education services:

- (a) Teacher Awareness: an awareness of their personal beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills;
- (b) Teacher Understanding: an understanding of their personal disposition and its

interaction with students' worldview; and

(c) Teacher Ability: an ability to provide ethically and culturally relevant pedagogy with appropriate interventions.

The following information details the significant aspects of each competency. Those significant aspects are evidenced in the self-rating form for teacher self-evaluation purposes.

### **Teacher Awareness: Beliefs, Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills**

#### **Hoover (2012) Step 1**

Self-reflection (Dray & Basler Wisneski, 2011) and self-improvement (Hoover, 2012) are at the center of self-awareness. Broadly, teachers must self-reflect on their social prejudices and biases, particularly within the public education system; more specifically, teachers must self-reflect on their interpretation of, and action on, their students' academic performance and behaviors (Dray & Basler Wisneski, 2011). Hoover (2012) outlines the steps of self-reflecting for teachers of unique students, such as CLD students and students who receive special education services. First, teachers must have a general understanding of IDEA 2004 and their specific school districts' policies and regulations. In addition to that understanding, teachers must possess knowledge of the over-representation issues in special education (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities more likely to be referred to and receiving special education services than their White, majority counterparts). This, in part, is due to biased assessment. Racial and ethnic minority students, or CLD students, inherently underperform on standardized assessments that are used to monitor academic achievement, track students for academic rigor, place students in particular programs, and make students eligible for certain services. Additionally, CLD students underperform on traditional classroom-based assessments due to the mismatch between school standards and their educational expectations (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014, Ortiz, n.d.). This calls

for Step 2 of Hoover's (2012) outline of self-reflection.

### **Hoover (2012) Steps 2 and 3**

In the next step, Step 2, teachers must acquire an S. These standards include:

- (a) linguistic competence: allowing the functional use of native languages in the classroom;
- (b) contextual learning: employing instruction that understands and values the context of home and community;
- (c) joint productivity: cooperative learning through reciprocal student-teacher engagement;
- (d) instructional conversation: English language development through ongoing verbal interactions;
- (e) challenging curricula: the delivery of curricula that promotes the use of higher-order thinking skills to challenge all students (Hoover, 2012).

Increased implementation and refinement of this framework accomplishes Step 3 of the outline, which is becoming knowledgeable of key cultural and linguistic factors that influence instruction.

### **Hoover (2012) Step 4**

By ensuring consideration of key cultural and linguistic influences in discussing referral of CLD students to evaluation for special education, school teams, which should include a school psychologist (Lanfranchi, 2014), reach Step 4 of Hoover's (2012) outline for effective self-reflection. Lanfranchi (2014) argues that, compared to teachers, school psychologists' assessments and choice of interventions demonstrate less cultural bias and higher levels of intercultural competence. As a result, teachers should collaborate with school psychologists in



the prereferral stage and, moreover, school psychologists should have a vital role in both the prereferral and referral of CLD students to special education. Although this held truer for larger school districts with well-sourced school psychology services than the contrary, the school psychologist nonetheless remains a resource for teachers. Teachers should utilize this resource once initial classroom-based interventions prove unsuccessful in meeting the needs of their CLD students. Collaboration with their school psychologists may enlighten them to unintentional yet culturally biased or unsound interventions.

Therefore, this competency, Teacher Awareness, calls attention to self-reflection and self-improvement. First, self-reflection allows teachers to reconsider their methods of classroom-based assessment in order to demonstrate their cultural competency and to avoid culturally biased assessment. At times, traditional assessments evaluate White, middle class standards in public education rather than content retained in alternative manners by CLD students, who are unique learners. Second, self-improvement allows teachers to increase their linguistic competency and integration of contextual learning practices. That is, teachers must increase their knowledge of second language acquisition, as well as provide learning activities that reflect CLD students' culture, home expectations, and community experiences. This criterion aligns teachers' instructional pedagogies with culturally and linguistically responsive methods. By recognizing that their personal dispositions manifest, overtly or covertly, in their interactions with their CLD students achieves the second major competency of multicultural efficacy.

#### **Teacher Understanding: Disposition and Its Interaction with Student Worldview**

Awareness of CLD students' acculturation process through an investigation into the background knowledge of these students, which can be achieved through consultation with their

families (Sanchez, Parker, Akbayin, & McTigue, 2010), is imperative to achieve the second competency, Teacher Understanding (Fernandez & Inserra, 2013). More specifically, Dray and Basler Wisneski (2011) provide a six-step process for mindful reflection to enlighten the relationship between the teacher disposition and its interaction with their students' worldview. Put simply, teachers are able to avoid a deficit thought model through taking the following measures:

- (1) explaining attributions they have about CLD students,
- (2) reflecting on their feelings and thoughts while working with CLD students,
- (3) considering alternative explanations to these feelings and thoughts,
- (4) checking their assumptions,
- (5) devising a plan to respond differently to CLD students in the future, and
- (6) revisiting this process continually.

Additionally, Dray and Basler Wisneski (2011) contend that teachers must communicate effectively about CLD students during the prereferral and referral stages of special education evaluation. Their suggestion for effective communication involves description, interpretation, and evaluation. That is, teachers must first describe their observations without attaching social significance followed by attaching that social significance in order to determine if positive or negative feelings coincide with that social significance. If student behavior, for example, is associated to cultural aspects of their disposition but result in negative feelings in other people affected by those behaviors, then teachers must focus on acculturation rather than special education referral. There is simply a disconnect between the culturally-related behavioral manifestations of CLD students and others' (e.g., White, majority students and teachers; Ortiz, n.d.) expectations in the public school setting. The incongruence that leads to this misperception

of CLD student behavior may be a result of the mismatch between middle-class instructional expectations and lower socioeconomic status understandings (Ortiz, n.d.). Often, immigrated CLD students and their families are part of the lower socioeconomic status group, while the public education system in the United States maintains middle-class ideals (More, Spies, Morgan, & Baker, 2016; Ortiz, n.d.; Solari, Petscher, & Folsom, 2014).

In addition to differences in socioeconomic expectations and understandings, CLD students tend to come from homes and communities that emphasize collectivist-learning approaches, whereas the instruction they receive promotes autonomy and individualistic approaches (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). Thus, it is important for teachers to distinguish difference and disability by using Dray and Basler Wisneski's (2011) six-step process for mindful reflection and description for effective communication. Once their perceptions are framed, teachers must then focus on increasing their educator knowledge of specific CLD students, language learning in general, and teaching practices that address CLD student need (More, Spies, Morgan, & Baker, 2016). After all, "learning is an actively reciprocated process between the... teacher and students; one is constantly shaping the other, bound by the social inherited knowledge that contains students' cultural and linguistic capital necessary to mediate comprehension (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014, p. 516). Evaluating sociocultural considerations, cognitive and academic development, and linguistic development will achieve this aim.

According to More, Spies, Morgan, and Baker (2016), teachers can increase their educator knowledge of specific CLD students by conversing with them about their feelings related to language learning, their familial structures and experiences, and societal expectations and perceptions related to language development. Likewise, teachers can increase their educator knowledge of language learning by understanding their CLD students' previous schooling

experiences, home environment, and early life experiences, as well as pretesting and assessing cognitive and academic skills in the students' native languages. With all of this information, teachers must then decide whether to employ simultaneous bilingualism or successive bilingualism approaches in their teaching pedagogy with CLD students in order to focus development of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. However, the latter step of this framework becomes largely dependent on the teachers' school districts. While some school districts have well-sourced and established ESL programs, others lack such a framework; while, some school districts and ESL programs permit bilingual instruction and use of students' native languages in the classroom, others do not (Ortiz, n.d.).

Therefore, this competency, Teacher Understanding, indicates that teachers must employ Dray and Basler Wisneski's (2011) six-step process for mindful reflection in order to explain their thoughts and feelings, reflect on their interactions with their CLD students, and consider alternative explanations and plans of interaction. Additionally, teachers must employ Dray and Basler Wisneski's (2011) suggestion of effective communication with team members, including CLD students' families, by remaining objective initially and then explaining the attached social significance and its related positive or negative perception by others. Through these two components, teachers gain insight to their CLD students' worldviews that include previous experiences and schooling, as well as home and community expectations. With this information, teachers align their instructional pedagogies with culturally and linguistically responsive methods more deeply than with the first competency alone, thus improving the preferral and referral processes by data- and information-driven decision-making.

### **Teacher Ability: Ethical, Cultural, and Pedagogical Interventions**

Fernandez and Inserra (2013) found that while prereferral processes vary across school

districts, referral processes are consistent due to IDEA's 2004 reauthorization. That is, while the academic interventions and progress monitoring of CLD students targeted to receive potential special education services vary in the prereferral stage, the assessment of CLD students maintains consistency in the referral stage. To validate these many processes, the research literature provides evidence that teams comprised of school personnel are needed when considering any students, particularly CLD students, for referral to special education evaluation. However, the composition and assumed responsibilities of those teams varies across the research literature.

For example, some school districts create teams comprised of only ESL, special education, and regular education teachers (Ortiz, n.d.; Sanchez, Parker, Akbayin, & McTigue, 2010), while some school districts include additional personnel such as school psychologists, social workers, support staff, specialists, and administrators (Gravios & Rosenfield, 2006; Sanchez, Parker, Akbayin, & McTigue, 2010). These teams are charged with devising academic interventions and progress monitoring that lead to unbiased, culturally and linguistically responsive assessments and have three common features that include a delivery system structured around an interdisciplinary team, a collaborative instructional consultation process, and an evaluation design to ensure that the innovation package has been implemented with integrity and fidelity (Gravios & Rosenfield, 2006; Ortiz, n.d.; Sanchez, Parker, Akbayin, & McTigue, 2010).

Generally, these teams result in a reduction of total referrals to and receiving of special education services by CLD students (Gravios & Rosenfield, 2006). This accomplishment is predicated on teams that form a consensus about the nature of CLD students' needs, determine priorities for intervention, help classroom teachers in selecting strategies and approaches,

assigning responsibility to each member for fulfilling the recommendations, and establishing subsequent meetings and plans of action (Ortiz, n.d.). Additionally, in alignment with IDEA 2004, and in response to the shortage of teachers untrained or underqualified to address the concurrent issues of language- and disability-related needs (Ortiz, n.d.), these teams maintain legitimacy of school districts' protocols by demonstrating CLD students are in positive school climates, their teachers use evidence-based instructional strategies known to be effective for them, that numerous and various interventions have shown unsuccessful in addressing their needs, and other educational alternatives prior to referral have also been unsuccessful. The type, intensity, and frequency of interventions vary across school districts, however, as seen in the research literature.

### **Prereferral Stage**

“Cultural responsiveness in education refers to structuring learning (and associated decision-making) that builds on students' diverse backgrounds, interests, and home/community teachings” through four practices:

- (1) quality instruction that includes cultural relevance, English language development, quality Tier 1 teaching, and supplemental Tier 2 instruction;
- (2) language development and usage that allows students' use of their native languages in the classroom and considers each student's stage of language acquisition;
- (3) unbiased classroom-based assessment and progress monitoring through multiple measures that directly assess knowledge and skills appropriate to the area of concern, English language proficiency, and interventions implemented; and
- (4) home-community-school connections that consider students' ability to adjust to a new community and school, value diverse cultural teachings and norms, and involve parents

or guardians in their students' educations (Hoover & Erickson, 2015, p. 18).

Collier (2004) and Scott, Boynton Hauerwas, and Brown (2014) provide two overarching frameworks for culturally and linguistically responsive academic interventions, progress monitoring, and response to intervention (RTI) models.

Collier (2004) argues that teachers must improve and expand the information gathering process during the prereferral stage in order to appropriately and accurately refer CLD students actually in need of special education evaluation. To accomplish this, Collier (2004) suggests developing resiliency-based instruction, differentiated learning support, and an RTI model. Collier (2004) further contends that staff training must be ongoing through current professional development on culturally and linguistically responsive instructional pedagogies. Fernandez and Inserra (2013) argue this as well. Moreover, rehiring of resigned or retired positions should focus on improving the faculty composition by hiring teachers trained in one or both areas of language and special education.

Scott, Boynton Hauerwas, and Brown (2014) concur with Collier (2004) about the professional development piece of culture and language responsivity but add that intervention must focus on explicit instruction of phonological awareness and vocabulary that builds on CLD students' skills in their native languages. Similarly, these researchers argue that a systematic integration of classroom-based assessment must occur where assessments are given in both languages (e.g., English and CLD students' native languages), valid and reliable, and measure language proficiency and acculturation in addition to the content. These researchers also suggest that teachers accept correct answers in either language, assess through alternative measures, and attend to patterns of CLD students' strengths and needs.

While this seemingly daunting task may best be accomplished through a coteaching

model that provides inclusion (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008), it is at time impossible due to constraints faced by school districts. To circumvent the potential coteaching obstacle, an RTI model (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008) and culturally responsive teaching approaches (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014) must be used. The RTI model consists of three tiers: Tier 1 is the primary prevention phase that utilizes universal screening, progress monitoring, oral language proficiency, and academic proficiency as means of assessment; Tier 2 requires small group tutoring for 15-20 week-sessions that provide several data points to determine referral to special education evaluation; and Tier 3 is tertiary intervention during the special education evaluation process in order to provide CLD students with one-to-one support. Concurrent with RTI is culturally and linguistically responsive teaching approaches used in regular classroom settings.

Orosco and O'Connor (2014) contend that cognitive determinants, through instructional engagement, contextualization, oral language development, and collaboration, are the center of culturally and linguistically responsive teacher approaches and must be achieved for CLD students. Teachers must include direct and explicit instruction that provides modeling and oral language development with evidence-based reading components that draw from CLD students' relevant schemas, background knowledge, and native languages. Additionally, teachers must provide questioning support that assists CLD students in answering comprehension questions and allows opportunities for CLD students to ask and answer questions about challenges they encounter during reading. Finally, teachers must provide engaging and motivating collaboration that not only involves CLD students in all reading activities but also allows them to practice skills-based instruction with one another through small group work. Once all of the aforementioned instructional pedagogies, interventions, and RTI model proves unsuccessful in addressing CLD students' needs should the referral for special education evaluation occur.



**Referral Stage**

Bilingual assessment and acculturation need to be considered during special education referral processes (Collier, 2004; Fernandez & Inserra, 2013; Rinaldi & Samson, 2008). Maintaining the validity of assessment is imperative to accurately determining eligibility of CLD students to receive special education services (Scott, Boynton Hauerwas, & Brown, 2014). Therefore, CLD students must be assessed in their native languages, when possible, and with reliable assessments that are free of cultural biases. This helps school psychologists and multidisciplinary teams to distinguish difference from disability. Although ethical and professional obligations to adhere to these guidelines exist, there is also a legal obligation established.

International, national, state, and local policies and regulations exist, though not comprehensive, in order to protect CLD students from unfair assessment that may result in their receiving special education services. For example, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) created international and national policies that guarantee equal opportunity to receive financially free primary education, lunch, and necessary programming and textbooks for immigrating CLD students and their families. While these stipulations are enacted at the national and state level in the United States (Solari, Petscher, & Folson, 2014), IDEA 2004 also requires nondiscriminatory identification and evaluation and least restrictive environment to ensure a free and appropriate public education for CLD students. The provision of nondiscriminatory identification and evaluation requires school districts to employ multi-factored methods of evaluation to determine eligibility. Likewise, the provision of least restrictive environment mandates that students, regardless of disposition, be educated to the maximum extent possible with same-age, non-disabled peers. Nonetheless, even with these legal

policies and regulations, an over-representation of CLD students referred to and receiving special education exists (Hoover & Erickson, 2015; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014).

Therefore, while these policies and regulations establish the foundation of the self-rating form, this tool focuses first on the prereferral process due to the lack of legal regulation on this aspect of CLD students being underserved in the regular education setting. This competency, Teacher Ability, encourages teachers to call upon their colleagues to create intervention teams that include as many members as appropriate in order to navigate the prereferral and referral stages. Then, with the team's support, teachers must employ resiliency-based instruction, differentiated learning support, and RTI, while the administrators must provide ongoing staff training about CLD issues. Throughout these interventions, teachers must integrate CLD students' native languages into instruction and assessment to verify acquisition of content, not only English language skills. Finally, throughout the entire process, but most importantly during the referral stage, school districts must adhere to legal policies related to special education services.

Chapter 3

PROJECT

# Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Special Education: Teacher Self-rating Form Ensuring Assessment Competency and Outcome Proficiency

*Tyler Herman*




**Teacher Awareness: Beliefs, Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills**  
*Classroom-level*

1. Self-reflection: Consider methods of classroom-based assessment in order to demonstrate cultural competency (Dray & Basler Wisneski, 2011).
2. Self-improvement: Increase knowledge of second language acquisition, while providing learning activities that reflect CLD students' culture, home expectations, and community experiences (Hoover, 2012).

**Teacher Understanding: Disposition and Its Interaction with Student Worldview**  
*Team Collaboration*

3. Mindful Reflection: Employ a six-step process for mindful reflection in order to explain thoughts and feelings, reflect on interactions with CLD students, and consider alternative explanations and plans of interaction (Dray & Basler Wisneski, 2011).
4. Effective Communication: Use effective communication with team members, including CLD students' families. This needs to include a description and explanation of public school expectations in the United States (Dray & Basler Wisneski, 2011).

**Teacher Ability: Ethical, Cultural, and Pedagogical Interventions**  
*Prereferral*

5. Collaborate with colleagues to create intervention teams that include as many members as appropriate in order to navigate the prereferral and referral stages (Gravios & Rosenfield, 2006; Ortiz, n.d.; Sanchez, Parker, Akbayin, & McTigue, 2010).
6. Employ resiliency-based instruction, differentiated learning support, and RTI, while administrators provide ongoing staff training about CLD issues (Collier, 2004).
7. Integrate CLD students' native languages into instruction and assessment to verify acquisition of content, rather than English language skills (Scott, Boynton Hauerwas, & Brown, 2014).

*Referral*

8. Throughout the entire process, but most importantly during the referral stage, school districts must adhere to legal policies related to special education services (IDEA, 2004; Scott, Boynton, Hauerwas, & Brown, 2014; UNESCO, 2012).



**Teacher Awareness: Beliefs, Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills**

Self-reflection: Consider methods of classroom-based assessment in order to demonstrate cultural competency (Dray & Basler Wisneski, 2011).

*I have unbiased preconceptions about student ability based on racial or ethnic identity.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I have unbiased preconceptions about student ability based on native language.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I avoid comparison of culturally and linguistically diverse students to majority, English-speaking students.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I use assessments free of cultural or linguistic biases.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I rely on self-created or authentic assessments more than prescribed or standardized assessments to evaluate student progress.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher Awareness: Beliefs, Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills**

Self-improvement: Increase knowledge of second language acquisition, while providing learning activities that reflect CLD students' culture, home expectations, and community experiences (Hoover, 2012).

*I allow the functional use of native languages in my classroom.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I create assignments and instruct in a manner that reflects the values and context of my students' homes and communities.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I foster cooperative learning between teacher and students, as well as students and other students.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I provide ample opportunities for verbal interactions and conversations to practice English language skills in my classroom.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I deliver a curriculum that promotes higher-order thinking skills and challenges all students.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher Understanding: Disposition and Its Interaction with Student Worldview**

Mindful Reflection: Employ a six-step process for mindful reflection in order to explain thoughts and feelings, reflect on interactions with CLD students, and consider alternative explanations and plans of interaction (Dray & Basler Wisneski, 2011).

*I can explain attributions I give to culturally and linguistically diverse students.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I reflect on my thoughts and feelings while working with culturally and linguistically diverse students.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I consider alternative explanations to my thoughts and feelings about culturally and linguistically diverse students.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I check my assumptions in order to exclude them from my classroom and instructional practices.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I create a plan at the beginning of the year to address the needs to culturally and linguistically diverse students.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

*I revisit my plan.*

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher Understanding: Disposition and Its Interaction with Student Worldview**

Effective Communication: Use effective communication with team members, including CLD students' families. This needs to include a description and explanation of public school expectations in the United States (Dray & Basler Wisneski, 2011).

*I objectively describe my observations of culturally and linguistically diverse students to other educational stakeholders, including families.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I interpret social significance within the school setting that becomes attached to those observations to other educational stakeholders, including families.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I evaluate my own and other school personnel's feelings about observations and attributed social significance within the school setting.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I address my own and other school personnel's feelings about observations and attributed social significance within the school setting.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I describe and explain the expectations of the public school system in the United States to the families of culturally and linguistically diverse students.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher Ability: Ethical, Cultural, and Pedagogical Interventions**

Collaboration: Collaborate with colleagues to create intervention teams that include as many members as appropriate in order to navigate the prereferral and referral stages (Gravios & Rosenfield, 2006; Ortiz, n.d.; Sanchez, Parker, Akbayin, & McTigue, 2010).

*I rely on my colleagues for expertise in their domains, such as special education or English as a Second Language (ESL) programming.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I contribute to and actively participate in a collaborative team to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students in my classroom.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I consider and implement academic interventions devised by a collaborative team to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students in my classroom.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I navigate the prereferral and referral to special education evaluation processes in collaboration with multiple colleagues.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_



**Teacher Ability: Ethical, Cultural, and Pedagogical Interventions**

Effective Instruction: Employ resiliency-based instruction, differentiated learning support, and RTI, while administrators provide ongoing staff training about CLD issues (Collier, 2004).

*I provide quality instruction that includes cultural relevance, English language development, Tier 1 teaching, and supplemental Tier 2 instruction.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I consider each student's stage of language acquisition.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I progress monitor students through multiple measures that directly assess knowledge and skills related to areas of concern.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I appreciate the adjustment that culturally and linguistically diverse students experience.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I involve parents and guardians in their children's educations.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher Ability: Ethical, Cultural, and Pedagogical Interventions**

Integrative Assessment: Integrate CLD students’ native languages into instruction and assessment to verify acquisition of content, rather than English language skills (Scott, Boynton Hauerwas, & Brown, 2014).

*I focus on explicit instruction of phonological awareness and vocabulary that builds on culturally and linguistically diverse students’ skills in their native languages.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I assess students in both English and their native languages.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I accept correct answers that students provide in either language.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I attend to patterns of strengths and needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I use valid and reliable assessments when collecting data for referral to special education evaluation.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher Ability: Ethical, Cultural, and Pedagogical Interventions**

Adherence to Laws and Regulations: Throughout the entire process, but most importantly during the referral stage, school districts must adhere to legal policies related to special education services (IDEA, 2004; Scott, Boynton, Hauerwas, & Brown, 2014; UNESCO, 2012).

*I provide a free and appropriate public education to all students, as defined by IDEA.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I foster inclusion for all students in order to achieve least restrictive environment, as defined by IDEA.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I use nondiscriminatory assessments, as defined by IDEA, when collecting data for referral to special education evaluation.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I discern disability from difference, which includes language needs and adjust my teaching practices accordingly.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

*I provide all supplementary aids and services afforded to students in my classroom.*

1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 often	5 always
------------	-------------	----------------	------------	-------------

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Scoring</b>	
Self-reflection	_____ / 25
Self-improvement	_____ / 25
Mindful Reflection	_____ / 30
Effective Communication	_____ / 25
Collaboration	_____ / 20
Effective Instruction	_____ / 25
Integrative Assessment	_____ / 25
Adherence to Laws and Regulations	_____ / 25
Total score: _____ / 200	

<b>Rating</b>		
Scores ranging from 160 to 200	80-100% proficiency	Distinguished
Scores ranging from 120 to 159	60-79% proficiency	Proficient
Scores ranging from 80 to 119	40-59% proficiency	Needs Improvement
Scores ranging from 0 to 79	0-39% proficiency	Failing

## Chapter 4

### DISCUSSION

#### **Implications for Theory**

Chu (2011) presents three competencies of teacher multicultural efficacy. Although being proficient in one or two of these domains is good, all three must be achieved. All three competencies—teacher awareness, teacher understanding, and teacher ability—are interconnected and work together to prepare the teacher to teach CLD students appropriately. Empowerment of teachers leads to empowerment of students. Thus, the self-rating form intends to demonstrate to reflective teachers the intricate fusion of Chu's (2011) three competencies in a manner similar to Ecclesiastes 4:12, that "though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves; a cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Proficiency in one of Chu's (2011) competencies is insufficient in addressing CLD students' unique needs, just as proficiency in two of the competencies can be ignored in certain circumstances. However, proficiency in all three competencies prevents errors and promotes both teacher efficacy and student learning. The braiding of these competencies is important and should inform decision-making regarding CLD students and special education evaluation.

#### **Implications for Practice**

This Master's project aimed to enhance the special education prereferral and referral processes by creating a self-rating form to guide teachers in differentiating CLD students who are in need of receiving special education services from those who do not need such services. The self-rating form enables teachers to employ culturally and linguistically responsive prereferral and referral processes and avoid inaccurate referrals based on evidence- and research-based interventions. Therefore, the intended outcome of this Master's project results in more

efficient and proficient referrals to special education evaluation than currently exists.

Additionally, this Master's project intended to increase equity in the classroom by increasing teacher awareness and understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity in learning. Through self-reflection after completing the self-rating form, teachers are able to adjust their pedagogy to include resiliency-based instruction, differentiated learning support, RTI, and unbiased assessments. Teachers are encouraged to accomplish this goal through a collaborative effort with multiple educational stakeholders, including families. Intervention teams should highlight each stakeholder's strengths and glean from each's area of expertise in order to address the specific needs of each CLD student.

Finally, this Master's project intends to increase CLD student achievement by effectively and meaningfully addressing each CLD student's needs in order to provide every student with a free and appropriate public education, within the least restrictive learning environment and based on data and evidence from nondiscriminatory assessments.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

While this project originated from a personal perspective of teaching in an urban school district with a student population that receives 100% free and reduced lunch and about 70% identify as Hispanic/Spanish-speaking, the self-rating form is a tool for all teaching contexts. For example, after resigning from the aforementioned position and accepting another teaching position at a neighboring, more affluent school district with a smaller Hispanic/Spanish-speaking student population for the upcoming academic year, the self-rating form will continue to be useful in developing my personal teaching efficacy while also allowing me to share it with my new colleagues. My special education colleagues will undoubtedly encounter CLD students who receive special education services for one of the eligible disability categories, whereas my

regular education colleagues will undoubtedly encounter CLD students who do not receive special education services but for which they are considering referral. This self-rating form will allow both groups of colleagues to reflect upon their pedagogy, adjust it if needed, and make informed decisions about whether to refer a CLD student to special education evaluation.

### **Future Research**

Future research should address the objectivity issue previously mentioned by researching the prevalence and process of referring CLD students to special education evaluation across multiple school districts that embody a variety of demographics. This will help to generalize the findings and arguments presented in this Master's project. Additionally, future research should aim to update the self-rating form based on new evidence- and research-based interventions and theories. The field of education, particularly special education, changes frequently in its expectations, practice, and targeted outcomes. Therefore, future research should aim to keep the self-rating form current and applicable for future teachers of CLD students.

### **Conclusion**

Aligned with Chu's (2011) three competencies of teacher multicultural efficacy, this Master's project provides a self-rating form for teachers to ensure efficient and proficient special education referrals as they relate to CLD students. More specifically, the self-rating form is a tool for teachers of CLD students to consider and adjust their methods in order to increase

- (a) an awareness of their personal beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills;
- (b) an understanding of their personal disposition and its interaction with students' worldview; and
- (c) an ability to provide ethically and culturally relevant pedagogy with appropriate interventions (Chu, 2011).

Like a three-gear system breaking with just one defective gear, multicultural teacher efficacy cannot be achieved in the absence of one or more of the competencies; like water being created through three atoms (e.g., two hydrogens and one oxygen), multicultural teacher efficacy is achieved through proficiency in all three competencies.



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