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Critical Consciousness in Decision-Making: A Model for Educational Planning and Instruction With Bilingual/Multilingual Students with Disabilities

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Será que no elegimos lo correcto? Was dual language immersion the best choice for my student, Fanny, if she is still not prepared for middle school? I hope I'm not making a mistake by advocating that she remain in the dual language program.

-Ms. Suárez, Fanny's special education teacher

Ms. Suárez's reflection depicts common issues faced by parents, teachers, and administrators who must decide what type of services will be most beneficial for a student who is acquiring English as a second language and has a disability. Making the decision is challenging when the members of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team do not have the necessary expertise to determine the instructional environments that best meet the needs of the largest growing subgroup of K-12 students, those classified as English Learners (ELs), henceforth bi/multilingual English Learners (b/mELs).

National data indicate b/mELs are overrepresented in special education; they represent 10.2% of the total student population, but 14% of all students with disabilities (U.S. DOE, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017; 2018). This raises questions about the effectiveness of the processes for referral, evaluation, and identification of for b/mELs who are suspected of also having a disability. Once identified, exceptional b/mELs often experience further marginalization within special education (e.g., more likely placed in more restrictive

settings; De Valenzuela et al., 2006; Sullivan, 2011). Finally, educators have little preparation

for teaching b/mELs (Villegas et al., 2018). Teachers who responded to a national survey of

special education teacher preparedness reported low confidence in supporting students and

families who speak languages other than English (Fowler et al., 2019). Therefore, when school-

level education professionals are faced with critical decisions about the educational trajectory of

b/mELs, doubts may arise about the best way to proceed. Since special education can either be

an appropriate support or a tool of exclusion, it is important for school personnel to understand

the role a child's bilingual status plays in the complex process of referral to special education,

eligibility, IEP development, and placement in the least restrictive environment (Wilkinson, et

al., 2006). This article highlights the importance of upholding all of a child's linguistic resources.

As a bilingual native Spanish speaker, Ms. Suárez understands the challenges of acculturation and learning a new language. She takes special care to build relationships with families and advocate so children receive the services they need. She has been the resource teacher at Santa Monica Dual-Language Immersion (DLI) school for three years. Two years ago, Fanny was placed on her caseload. When stories or passages are read to her, Fanny is able to provide key details and understand the main idea of the text. Her Spanish vocabulary allows her to express her ideas and opinions in more detail. She has a positive attitude and is motivated to learn. She asks for help and never gives up. When speaking in her home language she becomes energetic, inquisitive, and "a little goofy". She enjoys talking about her family and their visits to Michoacán, Mexico. Fanny has difficulty identifying English vowel sounds, decoding and encoding sounds into words, remembering sight words, and retaining information over time. Also, Fanny tended to struggle with visual tracking while reading in both languages (e.g., in Spanish she'll reverse syllables se → es and in English she exchanges visually similar letters such as p, b and d). She has significant difficulties recalling newly introduced words and expressing complete thoughts in either language.

Ms. Suárez implemented many strategies to support Fanny, from repetition and visual supports to highly structured reading intervention programs, yet Fanny continues to demonstrate these challenges with literacy and makes errors often. Though Ms. Suárez advocated for Fanny to continue in the dual language program, the majority of the IEP team *agreed on the following changes to her IEP:*

1) *Exit Fanny from DLI to an English-only instruction program*
2) *Stop Spanish reading interventions to prevent confusion with English phonological rules*
3) *Place Fanny in a Special Day Classroom (a separate class for e students with disabilities who are significantly below grade level) where she can receive English reading interventions in small groups or one-on-one*
4) *Encourage Fanny's mother to limit the use of Spanish in the home and encourage Fanny to*

speak to them and to her brother in English only

The actions proposed for Fanny, while well-intentioned, stem from a language-as-problem orientation (Ruiz,1984) and are driven by myths about bilingual language development and by a lack of understanding of the intersection of language differences and disabilities. This article provides a model to guide special educators and IEP teams in making decisions based on a critical consciousness of sociolinguistic and learning factors. Specifically, guidance is provided on how to a) recognize personal linguistic ideologies and commonly held misconceptions about second language acquisition; b) gather information for a holistic language profile, c) identify issues marginalizing bi/multilingual English Learners (b/mELs) placed in special education, d) develop IEPs supportive of, and effective for, cultural and linguistic needs, e) engage families in the IEP process, and f) advocate for b/mELs to ensure equitable access to the general education curriculum. The application of this decision-making process is illustrated with the case of Ms. Suárez and her student, Fanny.

Context of education for bi/multilingual English Learners (b/mELs)

"English Learner" is the federal classification for students who speak a language other than English, are still acquiring English language proficiency, and whose level of English proficiency interferes with their ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where instruction is in English. Since students already speak a home language other than English, with roughly 80% speaking Spanish as their first language (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) and the others speaking one of the 400 languages represented in the U.S., these students are referred to as bi/multilingual English Learners (b/mELs).

Services to support b/mELs' ' language acquisition vary across contexts. There are various modes ranging from supporting the bilingualism/biliteracy of students to only supporting the development of English. In English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Language

Development (ELD) settings, educational programming is strongly influenced by a monoglossic

linguistic ideology, or a belief that monolingualism is the norm and bilingualism is

extracurricular (García, & Torres-Guevara, 2010). In contrast, a pluralinguist ideology maintains

no two people have the same linguistic resources; instead, variation is the norm. Pluralinguism

supports a language-as-resource perspective (Ruiz, 1984). In DLI schools, a monoglossic

ideology can be enforced by strict separation of languages where the target-language teacher

insists students only use the target-language during class and likewise for subjects instructed in

English. In contrast, educational programming where pluralingualism is valued, students are

encouraged to use their entire linguistic repertoire to access the content and express their

understanding of the task at hand. Each student is on their own linguistic trajectory influenced by

factors such as home language use, exposure to English, educational histories, and cultural

backgrounds. With so many variables to consider, a student's individual needs can be

misinterpreted. The Critical Consciousness Decision-Making (CCDM) Model (Figure 1 below)

is offered to provide education professionals a process for engaging in the IEP process with a

language-as-resource stance, no matter their bilingual background, training in bilingual language

development or prior experience in bilingual schools.

Critically Conscious Decision-Making: A Model for Considering the Intersections of

Bilingualism and Disability in IEP Planning

When educational professionals commit to "critical consciousness", they seek to perceive

the social, political, and economic inequities present in society, engage in dialogue, and

ultimately advocate for change (Palmer et al., 2020). This term was coined by the renowned

Brazilian educational philosopher, Paulo Freire (1970), who asserted the role of a teacher is to

educate students on the systems of oppression impacting their lives and to take critical action to

dismantle these systems. Freire recognized for teachers to lead their students, they must make an ongoing commitment to becoming aware, or conscientização, of the sociopolitical dynamics of "what is taught, how, and to whom" (Gay & Kirkland, 2003 p. 181). The CCDM model incorporates tenets of culturally and linguistically responsive frameworks which assert the importance of critical reflection on personal beliefs and attitudes, perceptions of others, and the broader sociopolitical dimensions influencing the educational opportunities of students from historically marginalized groups such as b/mELs (Author 1, 2019; Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017.

The CCDM model consists of six considerations in two domains, building background knowledge and enacting this knowledge into practice. In the *preparation phase*, to build background knowledge (Watts et al., 2011), IEP team members:

1. **Reflect:** What are linguistic ideologies of the team members?

2. **Review:** What information has the team collected about the student? and

3. **Recognize:** What socio- linguistic and political factors might impact the student's access to FAPE and LRE?

These three actions allow IEP team members to examine beliefs, values, and attitudes to align with a language-as-resource orientation and help the team develop a critical awareness of the sociolinguistic profile of a focal student.

Next, in the *practice phase,* the team integrates the information gathered from phase one to create and enact a program that takes "critical action" toward supporting the student's holistic linguistic profile. Specifically, the team,

4. **Plans for Service Delivery:** How will the plan for the student's educational programming incorporate culturally and linguistically appropriate goals, accommodations, modifications, and services?

5. **Partners to Engage Families & Communities:** How will the student's educational programming incorporate the cultural funds of knowledge based on the values of the student, their family and community?

6. **Practices & Advocates:** How will the team advocate for, and put into practice, the language-as-resource approach?

Figure 1

Critical Consciousness in Decision-Making (CCDM) Model for IEP planning
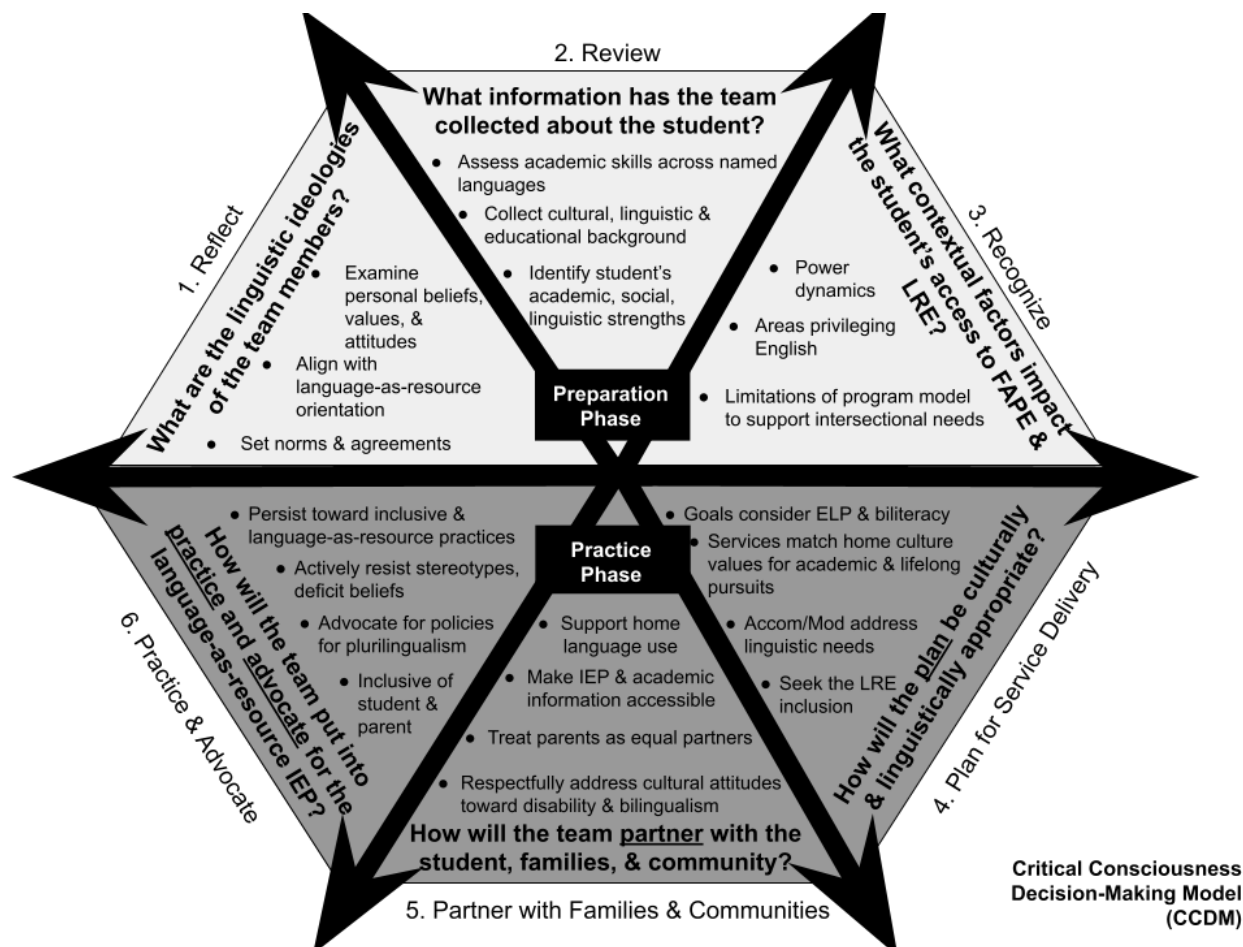
CCDM Preparation Phase: Reflecting, Reviewing, and Recognizing

Step 1: Reflect on Linguistic Ideologies. Even as the demographics of the student population shifts, myths about becoming bilingual persist in policy and practice. Consequently, these myths manifest negative ideologies that can drive IEP teams to make educational program decisions from a language-as-problem. The intersection of disability and language is rarely straightforward, often presenting difficult contexts for educators and parents, and as in the case

with Fanny, it can be hard to know what to do. In this segment, Ms. Suárez demonstrates how

she applied Step 1 of the CCDM process.

The School psychologist, Speech Language Pathologist, and General Education Teacher leaned on their ideologies of bilingualism and disability and concluded that the DLI track had caused Fanny to fall "behind" in her English language acquisition. At the end meeting, Ms. Suárez requested the team refrain from making a final placement decision for Fanny's 6th grade year until she could gather additional information.

To start the CCDM process, Ms. Suárez recognized it was important to support her team members in reflecting on their beliefs. First, she listed the team's proposed solutions (Exit Fanny from DLI to an English-only instruction program, stop Spanish reading interventions, place Fanny in a Special Day Classroom, and encourage Fanny's mother to limit Spanish at home) and suggested how these decisions had a bilingualism-as-problem orientation. Then, she referenced the research on the possible long-term negative impact of these decisions, such as disrupted, intimate family relationships, a shift toward instruction in Fanny's weaker language (weakening the foundation for English development), a loss of bilingual identity, less access to general education curriculum, a trajectory toward modified diploma, separation from Fanny's existing peer network, and an increased likelihood of Fanny dropping out of school.

Implementing Step 1: Reflect. To ensure the IEP team starts on common ground, the

team examines the linguistic ideologies held by each team member. Each member will critically

reflect on their beliefs, values and attitudes that frame the home language as a problem for

b/mELs with disabilities. Ask, a) "What beliefs does each team member hold about the

intersectionality of bilingualism and disabilities?", b) "In what ways must the team align their

beliefs?" and c) "What norms and agreements can guide the process?"

In response to question (a), each team member lists their personal beliefs about

bilingualism for students with disabilities and examines their beliefs in contrast to the most

current research-based evidence. The following table lists four of the most common myths and

the counter evidence-based facts about the intersectionality of bilingualism and disability.

Additional information can be found at ¡Colorín Colorado! and from the Office of Special

Education Program's Model Demonstration (https://www.mtss4els.org).

<insert Table 1>

Next, question (b) prompts the team to discuss how to align their linguistic ideologies to a language-as-resource orientation. This discussion is guided by two key principles: 1) the bilingual mind operates from one holistic linguistic system, and 2) bilingualism provides b/mELs with additional linguistic resources.

When observing bilingual speakers, it often appears they are "switching back and forth between languages" and therefore, that they have two separate language systems. However, the perception that a bilingual speaker is two monolingual persons in one has long been problematized and debunked in the literature (Grosjean, 1989; Otheguy et al., 2015). Figure 2 illustrates that, to an external viewer, a person speaking a diversity of languages appears to draw on each language separately, when, in fact, the speaker is drawing from one, integrated linguistic system in their brain.

Figure 2

The internal vs. external perspectives of bilingualism
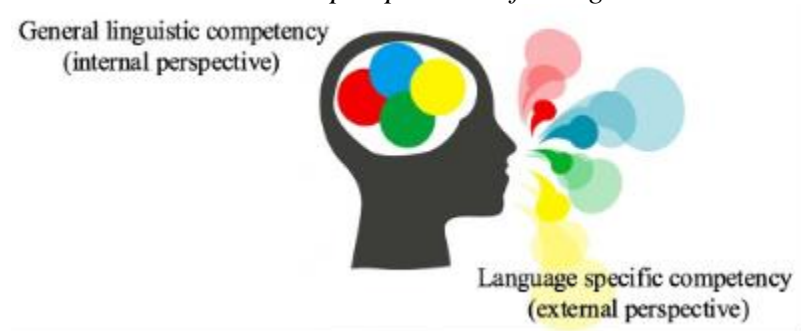
As they review their beliefs, each team member must critically reflect on ways they talk about t b/mELs as being strong in one language and weak in another, or otherwise describe their ' linguistic skills as operating from two distinct language systems. Instead of this strengths and weaknesses rhetoric, they must agree to investigate what the student can do holistically with all of their linguistic resources (i.e., using translanguaging). For more information and examples see CUNY-New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals (NYSIEB) Translanguaging

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Resources.

To adopt a language-as-resource orientation, the team must recognize both the external

and the internal processes of bilingualism, similar to understanding monolingual language

development as both receptive and expressive. To demonstrate this, replace any words from the

above myths that represent the external view of bilingualism (e.g. more than one language, L1,

code-switching, etc.) with something that represents the internal perspective as well, such as

"additional linguistic resources." In table 1, these myths have been restated as strengths-based

agreements the team will adopt to guide the remaining steps of the CCDM process.

Step 2: Review Information Collected About the Student & Adjust to a Holistic

Linguistic Profile. This step asks service providers to continue to reflect on linguistic ideologies

involved in decision making as they review information collected about the student. Adopting

the principles of bilingual language development in Step 1 will aid the team in gathering the

appropriate assessment data and student information to develop a holistic student profile. In this

review, the team will move away from a language-as-problem orientation which may have

focused on the students' deficits, as was noted in Fanny's initial meeting. Instead, by adopting a

language-as-resource orientation, the team will collect information to highlight the students'

cultural and linguistic assets.

Ms. Suárez Reviews Fanny's Assessment Profile
After reviewing the team's misconceptions, Ms. Suárez continued in the CCDM process
and reviewed Fanny's educational history, assessments, and classroom observations.
Summary of Fanny's Educational History
When Fanny was in first grade, she was referred to Special Education services.
The general education teacher noted that Fanny experienced significant academic
challenges, particularly in the areas of reading; she had difficulty remembering letters
and sounds, as well as numbers. For the initial IEP, she was assessed in the areas of
cognitive functioning, academic skills and language proficiency. Language proficiency
was determined using the Woodcock Muñoz. Cognitive functioning was determined by a
nonverbal test. Academic skills were primarily assessed in English. At the eligibility
meeting, the team found a significant discrepancy between her cognitive abilities and

academic performance. She was found eligible in the category of specific learning disability and given special education services in all academic areas.

Excerpt from Evaluation Report by the School Psychologist

The triennial evaluation was conducted at the beginning of Fanny's 5th grade year. The full evaluation included assessment of non-verbal cognitive ability, phonological processing in English, and academic assessment in English and Spanish. Results indicated that Fanny continues to have difficulty with memory (an issue identified in her initial evaluation). Fanny's scores on academic assessments were in the low average and average range in Spanish. She could read nonsense words in Spanish, but scored in the very low range on this assessment in English. Fanny has not learned English commensurate with her EL peers and has difficulty with basic multi-step instructions at school and at home.

General Education Teacher comments:

"Fanny tends to 'code-switch'. She can't even spit out a complete sentence in Spanish. Fanny is obviously confused. As a result, I doubt that Fanny is capable of continuing to learn both Spanish and English. I think it best to move her to an English-only classroom in middle school."

When she concluded the file review, Ms. Suárez realized that many of the decisions regarding Fanny's education had been based on limited data from a monoglossic perspective. Fanny's linguistic profile only represented her knowledge and skills from either Spanish or English. None of the assessments had allowed Fanny to use all of her linguistic resources to perform the task at hand. Furthermore, each team member had interpreted Fanny's skills based on erroneous understanding of bilingual language development.

Implementing Step 2: Review. Arguably the most important step in IEP planning is

gathering accurate and appropriate assessment data. In the case of an exceptional b/mEL, the

information gathered must be inclusive of strengths, academic abilities across languages, a

holistic linguistic profile, as well as their cultural and educational background. One of the most

common areas lacking in a b/mELs assessment profile is a holistic picture of how they use their

linguistic resources from all named languages to understand (listening/reading comprehension)

and express (spoken/written language) themselves. Retelling stories is one informal assessment

tool that allows students to demonstrate translanguaging and provides important insights into a

student's language usage.

Author 2 and Co-author (2019) found that allowing students to tell and practice retelling

stories, related to 7th grade math content (one variable/two-part equations and volume), with all

of their language resources, facilitated greater language and content development, when compared to requiring the students to learn the content monolingually. In the following example, Patti (a student from the study), relays her story about a boy cutting grass and filling containers with the grass (p. 38):

> Ah so he cut one house for 15 dollars for hour. But he weighted a total of 25,000 inches cube and he needs to know …*¿cómo se dice cuánta? Cuánta* grass *cabe (how do you say How much? How much grass fits)* in the basket cube and he take the volume of the basket cubes to know how many grass *cabe (fits).*

In the above language transcript sample, when Patti did not know a word in English, she used the Spanish word. This allowed her to continue to tell the story, show what she knew, and solidify her content knowledge. While retelling the story, a few days later, Patti confidently used all English.

Research in bilingual psycholinguistics indicates that bilinguals have *one language system* that contains linguistic features (words, phonemes, morphemes, phrases, etc.) from the "named languages" in their repertoire (Grosjean & Li, 2013). Code-switching**,** the alternation of named languages within or between sentences, is solely an external perspective of bilingualism. What appears as a "switch" is just the bilingual mind combining and alternating features to produce language, just as monolinguals do, the difference being that what is produced includes features from multiple named languages. This is referred to as translanguaging (Otheguy, et al., 2015), or the language practices and abilities of bi/multilinguals as they use features of their full linguistic repertoire, across multiple named languages, for effective communication. One way to observe translanguaging is through "storytelling oracy", where students retell a story encouraged to use all of their linguistic resources. This practice mirrors skills used in the process of reading

and writing (Author 2 & co-author, 2019). Oracy development and practice with narrative skill is

important for success at school and why some researchers, such as Miller et al. (2006) have

stated that having kids tell stories is a better predictor of reading achievement in both Spanish

and English, than having them do passage comprehension.

Having developed a comprehensive understanding of bilingualism (incorporating both the internal and the external perspectives), Ms. Suárez is wary of the school psychologist's recommendation. Determined to gather additional information to inform the IEP team's decisions, she decided to leverage bilingual storytelling and retelling to learn what Fanny knows and is capable of doing, when she is allowed to use her full linguistic repertoire.

Original Spanish	*English Translation*
Suárez (S):*Vamos a ver que sucedió en este cuento de hadas. Aquí te están dando cuatro imágenes. You can use English or Spanish. ¿Qué pasó primero Fanny?* Fanny (F): *Falleció su papá y le dio herencia de un gato.* S: *Ok, le dio la herencia de un gato. Y qué pasó con eso?* F: *Le ummmm.. Le dijo ummm that he wanted to be rich.* S: *¿Quién le dijo que quería ser rico?* F: *Ummm Carlos al gato* S: *Y luego qué pasó?* F: *El gato cachó a ummm conejo y se lo fue a dar al rey. El rey vio a Carlo y ummm gave him clothes... y shoes.* S: *¿Por qué le dio clothes?* F: *Porque estaba mojado* S:*Ah estaba mojado? Orale* F: *Aja* S: *Y después qué pasó?* F: *Se enamoró con la reina,... no, the princess.* S: *¿Se enamoró de la princesa?* F: *Sí. Se enamoró con la princesa.* S: *Eso, y después qué pasó?* F: *Se casaron y vivieron felices.*	Suárez (S): *Let's discuss what happened in this fairy tale. Here we have four images. You can use English or Spanish. What happened first, Fanny?* Fanny (F): *His father passed away and left him a cat as an inheritance.* S: *Ok, so he inherited a cat from his father. And, what happened next?* F: *He ummmm… He said, umm that he wanted to be rich.* S: Who did he tell that he wanted to be rich? F: *Ummm Carlos the cat.* S: *And, then what happened?* F: *The cat caught a rabbit and went to give it to the king. The king looked at Carlos and gave him clothes and shoes.* S: *Why did the king give him clothes?* F: *Because he was wet.* S: *Oh, he was wet? Keep going...* F: *Yep* S: *And after that what happened?* F: *He fell in love with the queen,... no the princess.* S: *Did he fall in love with the princess?* F: *Yes. He fell in love with the princess.* S: *Wow, and after that what happened?*

	F: *They got married and live happily ever after.*

Ms. Suárez shared this language sample transcript with the school psychologist and together they reviewed how Fanny's oral abilities were stronger when allowed to tell a story using all of her language resources. They noted how Fanny demonstrated strengths in both language microstructure (vocabulary, syntax) and macrostructure (characters, setting, initiating event, problem, solution, etc.). Ms. Suárez then updated Fanny's assessment profile to include these linguistic assets.

Step 3: Recognize the Sociolinguistic and Sociopolitical Factors Impacting Access.

Beyond reflecting on linguistic ideologies and reviewing holistic data, gathered on a student,

service providers will need to also recognize sociolinguistic and sociopolitical factors that impact

students' access to free appropriate public education (FAPE) and least restrictive environments

(LRE).

Ms. Suárez leads the Team to Recognize

Following her meeting with the school psychologist, Ms. Suárez once again looked at the team's initial decisions from a systems perspective. She recognized the following socio-linguistic and -political dynamics influencing Fanny's Education:

a) *The team's initial decisions did not recognize the <u>limitations of the school program model</u> to support her bilingual language development. There were no interventions designed with translanguaging methods or supports to make transfer of linguistic features explicit. As a result, the onus was placed on Fanny's learning disability as the explanation for her slow English language acquisition rather than the curricular design.*

b) *In each decision, there was <u>a preference for English over Spanish</u>. This did not consider how Fanny's social emotional development within her family and her community would be impacted by switching her to English-only instruction.*

c) *The assumption that the family could not support Fanny's education unless English was used in the home misrepresented the ways her mother prioritized Fanny's education by setting aside homework time, asking her about school, seeking to learn English herself, and staying in contact with Fanny's teachers.*

d) *Placement in a special day class did not take into consideration the long-term impact of limiting her <u>access to educational opportunities</u> such as the general education curriculum, likely resulting in a modified diploma, and possibly preventing her from pursuing a post-secondary education.*

Noting the serious ramifications of the Language-as-Problem decisions, Ms. Suárez recognized the need for the team to reconvene. Prior to convening the meeting, she had separate discussions with the school-based members and Fanny's mother to ensure each person's misperceptions were addressed.

Having concluded the CCDM preparation phase, Ms. Suárez was equipped with the research, holistic student profile, and systems-perspective to guide the team to language-as-

resources based decisions. This time the team would be prepared to reflect from a language-as-resource orientation, review Fanny's holistic language profile, and recognize barriers that would need to be addressed in the final IEP. See the "Language-as-Resource" Summary Sheet (Table 2 included in supplemental materials).

Implementing Step 3: Recognize. A key aspect of critical conscious decision-making is taking into consideration the broader sociopolitical context surrounding the student's educational experience. When a team *recognizes* how their decisions for this particular student coincides with district, state, or national trends, they prepare to make a concerted effort to resist these trends and improve outcomes. Depending on the team's decisions, it may be important to *recognize*: a) areas for improvement of the school program model, b) privileging of English over the home language, c) deficit perspectives of the students' familial or cultural environment, or d) access to equitable educational opportunities.

The original decisions for Fanny's placement and IEP arose from a language-as-problem orientation erroneously informed by Myth 3 and 4. Still driven by the external view of bilingualism, these myths caused the IEP team to implore parents to stop using L1 at home. This not only assumes that a shift to an English-only home environment is possible, but also if parents try to comply, this can lead to b/mELs experiencing a loss of their bilingual identity and to a decrease in intimate family communication. Research links continued L1 use at home to positive language and emotional development (Sam & Berry, 2016). At school, those b/mELs who are exited from bilingual education programs to English-only general education classrooms, may lose peer social networks and experience negative psychological and academic impacts (Parra, et al., 2014). The final consideration in the *preparation phase* of CCDM demonstrates how the team can *recognize* the sociopolitical factors surrounding Fanny's access to a free, appropriate public education in a least restrictive environment.

Following the application of the top half of the CCDM model (*reflect, review, recognize*)

to a holistic view of bilingualism, the next step is to turn to the bottom half (*plan, partner, practice/advocate*). In this phase, Fanny's IEP team will illustrate how to take a critically conscious approach to planning and implementing a language-as-resource IEP.

CCDM Practice Phase: Planning, Partnering & Practicing Advocacy

One of the most nuanced and complex aspects of being a special educator is helping parents and the IEP team make decisions about a child's educational services. This is especially complex when a child has intersectional needs across culture, language and disability that make teachers, parents and administrators feel unqualified to determine the best course of action. However, with the guiding principle of language-as-resource for conceptualizing the bilingual mind, Ms. Suárez is prepared to advocate for an IEP that addresses Fanny's holistic linguistic profile.

Step 4: Plan for Service Delivery. There are no easy answers to the questions Fanny's IEP team is wrestling with as members consider next steps in updating recommendations for specialized instruction and program placements. Dilemmas may arise over which language should be used for annual goals, designing interventions, and monitoring progress (Genesee & Fortune, 2014; Zetlin, et al., 2011). Additional questions arise as to the language of instruction that is the most appropriate to support the students' learning processes and how to support access to the general education curriculum in a bilingual classroom (Kangas, 2017). Furthermore, parental aspirations and concerns may not be represented and equitably in the IEP teams' considerations (Mueller, et al., 2009). However, with the CCDM model, a skilled special educator can act as the facilitator guiding the team to designing a truly individualized education program for the focus child that incorporates cultural and linguistic factors.

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Implementing Step 4: Plan. Using the CCDM model, the planning process starts like

any other IEP with identifying student strengths. The important caveat here is that these strengths

are contextualized by the students' cultural and linguistic background. Ms. Suárez asked each

member to reframe previously considered language-based-weaknesses as strengths. Next, the

team approached each component of the IEP centering the question, "How will the plan be

culturally and linguistically appropriate?"

Ms. Suárez leads the Team to Plan

On the day of the reconvened IEP meeting, Ms. Suárez was prepared to focus the team on three questions that would guide the discussion.

1. *What are Fanny's strengths?*
2. *What goals will address her needs for biliteracy and English language proficiency? How do these goals address the hopes and values of the family?*
3. *What should be the language of instruction?*
4. *How should academic interventions be designed to help Fanny meet grade level academic standards?*

As the meeting began, Ms. Suárez gave the team members the language-as-resource Summary Sheet and asked the team to identify Fanny's strengths.

For question 2 and 3, she had provided the team with some articles showing how research supports that children learn best when they are taught in their stronger language. She connected this research to Fanny's needs explaining,

> *"Her assessment data indicate that Fanny's stronger language is Spanish, so the goal should be to strengthen Fanny's Spanish language skills as the path to improve achievement in English. Skills acquired in Spanish can then be transferred and extended through ESL/ELD instruction. We can discuss accommodations for the general education classroom that allow Fanny to use translanguaging practices to demonstrate her knowledge and skills. Some of these might include, documenting what Fanny can do in both languages, prior to instruction; providing translanguaging rings of support, during instruction; establishing a purposeful and consistent routine of when students can translanguage during each lesson; and similar to the last example, adopting a 10 & 2 approach, where for every 10 minutes that the teacher speaks in English, allow the students 2 minutes to use whatever language they want to review and work wit the content. From the research on other students who are b/mELs like Fanny, bilingual language development is dynamic and bi-directional. To support cross-linguistic transfer we will need to explicitly teach her these practices."*

For question 4, Ms. Suárez sought the input of the general education teacher to share how

oral language is taught in her classroom. Together, they discussed how to support Fanny to

benefit from both core instruction and complementary special education interventions. This

discussion included the identification of how translanguaging could be used as an instructional tool as well as an accommodation for Fanny to access the general education curriculum.Both core instruction and special education intervention must simultaneously address Fanny's achievement difficulties and her current language proficiency (Dixon, 2013). To that end, oral language goals must be integrated across the curriculum to support literacy acquisition and to help Fanny meet grade level content standards. This principle holds whether instruction is in Spanish or in English. Progress is dependent on Fanny being provided systematic, explicit instruction to address skill gaps, giving priority to those skills that will accelerate access to the grade-level curriculum (e.g., teaching discipline-specific vocabulary, teaching study skills).

Translanguaging as an Instructional Tool. Each language-as-resource solution takes an approach that recognizes Fanny (and all of her linguistic funds of knowledge) as a whole person, rather than positioning her as two monolinguals in one. Through acknowledging both the external and the internal perspectives of bilingualism teachers and administrators can purposefully and strategically promote, facilitate, and encourage translanguaging practices in the classroom. There is emerging evidence that intentional and purposeful instruction using translanguaging can enable students to draw on all of their linguistic resources to access the content at hand (García et al., 2017). For more on the translanguaging strategies mentioned by Ms. Suárez, above, see Sánchez et al. (2018), Author 2 (2016), and the CUNY-NYSIEB Translanguaging guide for more resources.

Step 5: Partner with Families & Communities. During the preparation phase, the team reviewed the student's cultural and linguistic background to create a holistic linguistic profile. However, this preparation does not necessarily ensure the team continues to treat the student's family as equal partners and incorporate familial input in the IEP. During the planning and

implementation phase, *Step 5* reminds the team to <u>partner</u> with the student, their family, and

community members to design a wraparound set of services that addresses the strengths and

needs identified by the students' holistic profile. In the case of Fanny, myths have also

influenced her mother's understanding of bilingualism and interpretation of Fanny's academic

progress. It is essential for the team to provide Fanny's mother with access to accurate resources

on bilingualism and learning disabilities so she can make informed decisions as an equal partner

in the IEP process.

Ms. Suárez Facilitates a Partnership with Fanny's mother

After the initial triennial meeting, Ms. Suárez discussed the assessment results with Fanny's mother to ensure she had a clear understanding. In their conversation, Fanny's mother expressed remorse over her and her husband's decision to place Fanny in the Dual Language Immersion program in kindergarten. At first, Ms. Suárez was unsure about how to console her and she told the mother that she needed to do some additional research to understand more about b/mELs like Fanny who have a learning disability. During the preparation phase, Ms. Suárez kept Fanny's mother informed about the additional information she was collecting and even provided Mrs. Mendez articles in Spanish, bilingual websites, and other resources.

In addition to keeping Mrs. Mendez informed about the school's actions, she asked Mrs. Mendez to observe Fanny at home and take notes about how Fanny used Spanish and English outside of school. Ms. Suárez emphasized how Mrs. Mendez's perspective was essential to making a placement decision at the next meeting and explained how she would be included as an equal partner in designing Fanny's IEP. Mrs. Mendez provided the following reflections which Ms. Suárez translated into English:

> *"Even though Fanny and her brothers were born in California, our family is originally from Michoacán, Mexico. Her dad and I came to the United States for better work opportunities and to give our children a good education. We are very happy in California, but we miss our family and friends in Michoacán. So, we visit during holiday breaks when we can. When we visit México, Fanny loves to play with her cousins and the other kids in the neighborhood. She is so funny and goofy at home, but I'm always worried when I see how quiet she is at school. I'm afraid if she only learned English she would forget her language and it would be hard for her and I to communicate. But I know she is having a hard time in school, I just don't know how to help her, so maybe it is better she focuses on English. I just want her to be able to have a good job, be happy, and go to college if she wants to."*

The concerns raised by Fanny's mother reflect common dilemmas faced by parents who

must decide whether their child with a disability, who is acquiring English as a second language,

will benefit from participating in a dual-language immersion program. Making the decision is

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challenging when the members of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team do not have the expertise to determine the instructional environments that best meet a bi/mEL's needs.

Implementing Step 5: Partner. The most essential support Fanny's family can provide is rich language stimulation and interaction in Spanish. This, in concert with family literacy practices such as reading and talking about books, will build the foundation for the acquisition of English at school. Table 2 provided in the supplemental materials lists ways that Fanny's family can get involved with supporting more language-as-resource solutions, such as bilingual story-telling with family and community members, reading dual-language books, and playing memory games. Table 2 also provides language-as-resource solutions that include instructional strategies and programmatic placement aimed to develop long term bilingualism and bilingual academic achievement in content areas.

Step 6: Practice & Advocate. In step 3, the team carefully evaluates the social, cultural, and political context surrounding the focus students' education to *recognize* any barriers to the students' access to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. However, it is "not enough" to recognize the problem (Palmer & Martínez, 2013, p. 274), but as change-makers, IEP teams engaged in critically conscious decision-making take critical action to ensure the language-as-resource educational programming is in fact implemented (Author 1, 2019; Watts et al., 2011). Critical action includes both the 'political efficacy' that change is possible and clear steps to address "institutional policies and practices, which are perceived to be unjust" (Watts et al., 2011, p .47). As discussed at the beginning of this article, education in the US is guided by a monoglossic ideology of bilingualism. In Step 6, the team discusses what systemic features within a school may inhibit implementation of a language-as-resource IEP. Next, the team discusses actions to advocate for the plan to be put into practice. In the case of

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Fanny, the team is considering which middle school program is the most linguistically

appropriate and inclusive placement to meet her intersectional needs.

Implementing Step 6: Practice & Advocate. At Santa Monica Dual-Language School,

Fanny receives instruction in Spanish and in English, consistent with the language of instruction

specified by the program model. If addressed from a language-as-resource orientation, Fanny is

more likely to reach toward meeting grade level language and academic accountability standards

in both Spanish and English. Overall a language-as-resource orientation makes a greater

emphasis on recognizing and leveraging both the internal and external views of bilingualism. To

illustrate the important considerations for Fanny's programmatic placement, the team considered

the benefits and possible harmful effects of each placement option, and identified specific

accommodations Fanny might need to be successful in her least restrictive placement.

The final step in the meeting was to discuss placement. First, Ms. Suárez guided the team
through the benefits and possible harmful effects of each placement option, based on either a
language-as-problem or language-as-resource orientation.
Option 1: Placement in a Self-contained special education class
Ms. Suárez explained:
> *Placing Fanny in a special education classroom to provide instruction at her*
> *current performance levels will maintain Fanny's low functioning by denying her access*
> *to the grade-level curriculum. Also, Fanny would not have access to her same-age peers*
> *who speak Spanish. This would isolate her during a key time in her life when friendships*
> *are so important.*
Option 2: Placement in a DLI program with Resource Support
Highlighting the list of positive outcomes in Table 2, Ms. Suárez reminded the team:
> *"When we first met, we thought Fanny should be exited from the DLI program*
> *because she was confusing Spanish and English. Now that we understand that research*
> *clearly shows that students with disabilities are not confused by dual-language*
> *instruction, let's look at the benefits of continuing in the DLI program with resource*
> *support…*

> *"We know it will be easier for Fanny to learn English with the foundation she has*
> *acquired from learning so much K-5 in Spanish. If she switched to English-only for*
> *content areas, we would have to give additional supports to fill in the gaps since she is*
> *still developing her English proficiency. Let's discuss some accommodations that will*
> *support Fanny to be successful in a DLI classroom…*

Table 2 illustrates the various supports that the team identified, including the use of "translanguaging rings of support". In conclusion, the team recognized that implementation would take time for content area teachers to adopt this practice and it would be a process of learning for everyone. Ms. Suárez checked in with each team member. The bilingual speech pathologist offered to add consultation time to support the general education teachers in adopting translanguaging practices, such as using bilingual story retells. The school psychologist offered to advocate for additional professional development by speaking with the principal. Finally, the whole team turned to Mrs. Mendez to see that she agreed,

> *Me hace bien feliz que Fanny puede mantener los dos idiomas. Yo sé que la hace contenta para continuar en las clases con sus amigas y yo siento mejor para saber que ella tiene apoyo para mejorar su inglés. Mi sueño es un día ella puede tener un buen trabajo y ser feliz siempre.*

Ms. Suárez knew implementing this plan would not be easy. There were many barriers the team would face, but hearing how content Mrs. Mendez was, she was pleased that they were on the right path for Fanny's future.

Even though the team selected Option 2, the team must consider how to practice and advocate for the language-as-resource plan. In practice, most DLI schools deliver monolingual instruction in English part of the day and monolingual instruction in Spanish during other parts of the day. This program model mandates strict separation of languages during instruction. Although this model provides Fanny and other b/mELs more opportunities to leverage their full linguistic repertoire, compared to English-only instruction, during Step 3 the team *recognized* that this strict separation of language during instruction continues to sociolinguistically and sociopolitically limit b/mELs' access to their full identities at school. To address the sociopolitical dynamics of the DLI program structure, the team can take critical action to actively resist this artificial separation by advocating for the purposeful and strategic implementation of translanguaging strategies (like those shared above). Through supporting Fanny's teachers to implement her accommodations for "translanguaging rings" all b/mELs in the classroom will benefit from the opportunity to fully learn and demonstrate what they know. With this holistic perspective of bilingualism as the outcome of the decision-making process for b/mELs with exceptionalities, students are able to leverage their complete linguistic repertoire and bilingual

funds of knowledge to learn new content, demonstrate knowledge of content, and develop bilingual identities.

Conclusion

As schools seek to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap between special educators and students at the intersections of learning and language, this case illustrates how educators can continue to apply one of the key tenets of special education, the strengths-based approach. The hegemony of English has become so pervasive in American society that the prioritization of English, at the cost of additional linguistic resources, largely goes unnoticed or problematized (Sánchez, et al., 2018). Fanny's case highlights the harmful repercussions aiming only for English language proficiency can have on the social/emotional, functional, and academic outcomes of a b/mEL with a disability. In the field of special education, the strengths-based perspective has been a foundational tenet grounding decisions in the IEP process; from how to describe students with disabilities using person-first language (Blaska, 1993) to the wording used to formulate present levels of performance (Elder, et al., 2018; Harry & Klingner, 2007). It is time to extend this application to the linguistic profile of bilingual/multilingual exceptional students as well. Practicing critical consciousness inherently requires a commitment to action. By implementing the CCDM model, districts, administrators, and special educators can lead the way to truly create equitable learning environments that are inclusive of students' holistic cultural and linguistic profiles leading to lifelong benefits in the academic and personal lives of bilingual/multilingual English Learners.

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