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Culturally Responsive Classrooms for Culturally Diverse Students With and At Risk for Disabilities

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ABSTRACT: *Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with and at risk for disabilities evidence the greatest need for quality instructional programs of all students in our schools because of disproportionate academic underachievement, special education referrals, and disciplinary actions. Authorities on culturally responsive instruction consistently point to the cultural dissonance between the home and school as a contributor to poor educational outcomes. Other researchers argue that these students are least likely to be taught with the most effective evidence-based instruction. This article discusses culturally responsive classrooms for CLD students with and at risk for disabilities within the context of culturally competent teachers, culturally effective instructional principles, and culturally appropriate behavior development. It discusses implications for educators and suggestions for a future agenda.*

Students in America's schools represent a mosaic of ethnicities and cultures. Current demographic changes include the growth of an increasingly diverse student population with greater academic, economic, and social needs. A recent report about the Columbus, Ohio, city schools, for example, reveals that during the past decade, the number of English language learners (ELLs) has quadrupled and the number of students from low-income families has increased by 19%, so that two thirds of the entire student body is at or below the poverty level (Candisky, 2007). Despite a series of laws attempting to equalize educational opportunities for minority and high-risk students, such efforts continue to be unfulfilled dreams (Utley & Obiakor, 2001). National data for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (i.e., African, Hispanic, and Native American) reveal high rates of dropping out of school, disproportionate special education placement, greater failure in meeting the state and national standards across basic subjects, and the poorest outcomes of all students in our schools (National Research Council, NRC, 2002; Wagner & Cameto, 2004).

Challenges facing educators in meeting the needs of CLD students include but are not limited to developing cultural awareness, identifying pedagogical approaches, and adjusting curriculum content (Banks et al., 2005). Consider the

following vignette about a kindergarten teacher and the challenges that she faces in an urban school district:

> Mary Andrews has been teaching kindergarten for more than 10 years in a large urban district. Most of her students are Hispanic and African American. In recent years, her class has included many recent immigrant ELL students from Somalia. Ms. Andrews struggles to teach all her students. She spends considerable time organizing and setting up various creative activities at her learning centers. These activities include allowing students to discover different words that have the same beginning or ending sounds and encouraging students to spend time with storybooks or listen to rap songs that name the letters of the alphabet in a rhythmic way. Even though she spends much time designing and implementing creative and academically engaging activities, most of her ELL and minority students are performing below the reading benchmarks of the district by the middle of the school year. Ms. Andrews wants her students to be successful; however, she is not optimistic about their progress. As in the previous year, she expects that most of the students will remain below benchmark and that at least 10% will be retained; many of them will eventually receive referrals to special education.
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> In addition to being culturally diverse, two thirds of Ms. Andrews's students are male. These kindergarten boys are active, frequently off task, and occasionally noncompliant. Ms. Andrews expresses considerable concern about these behavior problems. Since Ms. Andrews is not skilled in behavior management strategies, she relies mainly on an adult male classroom aide to reprimand the students or she uses exclusionary practices of in-school or out-of-school suspensions. No matter what classroom actions she takes, classroom disorder persists.

The preceding vignette illustrates several issues that educators must confront when teaching CLD high-risk students. First, the one-size-fits-all approach is not a viable option for increasing the achievement of CLD students (Love & Kruger, 2005). A need exists for differentiated (Ladson-Billings, 1994; McCollin & O'Shea, 2005) and intensified (Foorman, 2001) instruction with a clear understanding of the most critical skills to teach (Simmons & Kame'enui, 2003); the most effective teaching methods to employ (Foorman & Moats, 2004); and methods of constantly assessing the progress of these students (Fuchs, Fuchs, Safer, & McInerny, 2005). This need is particularly acute for low-socioeconomic CLD learners who evidence significant gaps between present and desired skill levels. Ms. Andrews also needs to understand that punitive and control measures are the least effective ways to help students become more adaptive in their behavior (Noguera, 2003; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). She needs to cultivate greater cultural awareness and understanding so that she can socialize her students in appropriate classroom behavior. When she becomes more culturally competent and skilled, Ms. Andrews can raise her expectations for both her students and herself.

The purpose of this article is to present learning environments for students with and at risk for disabilities according to validated practices in culturally responsive teaching and effective instruction. Specifically, the article discusses the culturally responsive classroom in terms of the cultural competence of the teacher, culturally responsive effective instruction, and culturally appropriate development of social behaviors. The positions taken in this article for culturally responsive teaching are grounded in the empirical literature (i.e., quantitative and qualitative investigations).

TEACHERS AS A FACTOR IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOMS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Culturally Competent Teachers

As our society increases in diversity, teachers and other school personnel have a corresponding need to increase in their understanding of the integral relationship between culture and social behavior and the need to view students' behaviors within a cultural context. Children who differ from the mainstream both physically and culturally are at risk for having their actions misperceived and judged unfairly. Likewise, these youngsters often

misinterpret the culture of the school and proceed in ways that seriously jeopardize their school and subsequent life success (Cartledge & Loe, 2001). Accordingly, teachers need a keen awareness of their own culture as well as that of their students, particularly in judging social skills and behaviors. For self-understanding, teachers need to recognize their own ethnocentrism and bias and realize that their worldview is not universal nor are their cultural norms absolute (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). All teachers, regardless of their racial and ethnic background, need to have self-awareness, they need to know about their own and other cultures, and they need to understand how their beliefs and biases can affect their teaching (Gay, 2002). For example, children who have been socialized to look away rather than make eye contact when directed by an adult are not necessarily being disrespectful and educators should not treat them as disrespectful. Likewise, children who come from cultural groups where "overlapping speech" is commonplace are probably unaware that this practice is not an accepted one in the larger society. Instead of punishing them, however, educators need to teach these students how to engage in turn-taking communication within the classroom. Teachers who understand culturally different behaviors respond in ways that appropriately and proactively accept or redirect students' behaviors when necessary.

To appropriately assess their students, teachers need to learn about their students' origins, education, relationship styles, family discipline strategies, views of time and space (e.g., punctuality), religion, food, health and hygiene, history, and traditions (Weinstein et al., 2004). To better understand and interpret student behaviors, teachers can make conscious efforts to get to know their students through such activities as scheduling lunch for informal conversations or having students bring in family pictures or albums to share with them. Meeting with family members, inviting community members to give presentations to the class, and participating in community activities are additional ways to become more knowledgeable about students' backgrounds (Cartledge & Lo, 2006).

Culturally Responsive Affirming Environments for School Success

Positive and affirming environments are central to developing a culturally responsive classroom. Some important teacher characteristics include empathy, caring, the ability to create a healthy classroom climate, leadership skills, humor, and involvement with children's social relations (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Monroe, 2005; Schneider, 1993). Compassion and flexibility are particularly important for teachers of CLD students. Regardless of a child's background or disability, teachers of CLD students must believe in the child's ability to make progress and must refrain from assuming that all of the child's difficulties reside solely within the child.

Teachers who understand culturally different behaviors respond in ways that appropriately and proactively accept or redirect students' behaviors when necessary.

Others often characterize teachers of CLD students with disabilities as having low expectations and negative attitudes toward these students, expecting the students to present problem behaviors, and typically attributing the lack of progress to the students (Gay 2000, 2002; Noguera, 2003). In their review of the empirical literature about teachers' expectations, Good and Nichols (2001) offer that teachers' beliefs and behaviors relate to student performance. For example, these researchers report studies that show Black students receiving lower teacher evaluations than White students despite higher test scores, as well as studies indicating that Black students, especially males, receive lowered academic scores because of classroom conduct. These authors also note other research indicating that over time, students who teachers perceive as less capable begin to ask fewer questions in class, an outcome that suggests that the students are learning "their place" (p. 121). Students frequently internalize these labels and embark on a cycle of increasingly poor academic performance or disruptive actions. Affirming teachers, however, hold high standards for their students, and they expect their students

to improve academically and conduct themselves appropriately. Teachers typically find that their students take pride in these expectations and respond accordingly (Ladson-Billings, 1994). A term used for such teachers is "warm demanders" (Banks & Tucker, 1998).

Authorities note the importance of caring classrooms for CLD and at-risk learners (Brown, 2003; Gay, 2000; 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In these environments, teachers demonstrate concern for children's emotional, physical, economic, and social well-being. Caring teachers work to build positive personal relationships with their students. These teachers respect and listen to their students, are friendly to their students within and outside the classroom, and encourage students to perform. Accordingly, the classroom environment features much smiling, positive touching, gentle teasing, and so forth (Gay, 2000). Such a classroom climate is important for several reasons. Although some research evidence indicates that students from diverse backgrounds are more likely than their European American counterparts to complain that school personnel do not care about them (Townsend, Thomas, Witty, & Lee, 1996), Casteel (2000) offers that the research on student perceptions of teachers of other races is equivocal. In his study of 160 African American seventh-grade students, the students did not indicate unfair treatment by their White teachers, although they indicated a slight preference for young African American teachers.

Nevertheless, there is little question of the benefits of caring teachers regardless of their race. Brown (2003), for example, shares research indicating that African American middle and elementary school children desire more meaningful personal relationships with their teachers; and in his qualitative study of 17 urban African American students, Howard (2001) found that they preferred teachers "who displayed caring bonds and attitudes toward them" (p. 131). Additionally, from the teacher's perspective, Brown found that effective culturally responsive teachers consistently reported that they cared for their students. Gay (2000) characterized uncaring teachers by their excessive criticisms, reprimands, disciplinary actions, and their infrequent praising and encouraging behaviors. Weinstein et al. (2004) point out that schools often attempt to coerce CLD learners to behave through the fear of punishment or the offer of reward, but simply communicating care and concern for the students is often more effective. The authors give an example of a teacher having difficulty with a class of Haitian children until she learned to express caring (e.g., "the adults here like you and want you to be good children"; p. 27).

Culturally Responsive Teachers Nurture Personal Development

CLD students with and at risk for disabilities need experiences that encourage them to persist with school and other worthwhile endeavors. Wynn (1992) contended that teachers' words are powerful and that "we can affirm success or we can affirm failure by what we say" (p. 97). Essentially, our actions toward young people can help them think of themselves as achievers or potential failures. Wynn advises educators to help young people think of themselves as achievers by identifying extraordinary goals. Jongyeun (1999) pointed out that successful students typically have a vision about their future but that unsuccessful students often believe that their success depends on others. Furthermore, successful students have long-range goals toward which they are systematically working. According to Jongyeun, the students' lack of goal orientation distinguishes success among some CLD youth (i.e., Hispanic and African American).

In addition to good, culturally responsive teachers, culturally specific male mentors would greatly help many CLD learners, especially males. All students benefit from positive, warm relations with important adults in their lives. Students who are experiencing significant adjustment problems and require individualized interventions should receive top priority. In a study on mentoring, Jongyeun (1999) matched low-income African American youth with adult mentors. The mentors and the students jointly set goals, which ranged from improving school attendance to performing better in a particular subject. The mentors committed to spending at least 2 hr per month with the students, with the possibility of additional hours outside school. The findings indicated that students who received mentoring for at least a year showed higher aspiration levels than students

who did not have mentors. Jeffries and Singer (2003) also reported successfully educating American Indian students by creating student learning teams and mentoring groups.

Culturally Responsive Teachers Are Introspective

For culturally responsive teaching, Howard (2003) theorized that teachers need to engage in critical teacher reflection. He advised that teachers should confront themselves relative to race and social justice to see how their beliefs and behaviors affect their teaching. Critical reflection, according to Howard, might take the form of responding to a series of pertinent questions. For example, regarding the discipline and social development of CLD students with disabilities, the teacher self-reflection process might be as follows:

1. What is the racial or gender breakdown of the students that I typically send from my class for disciplinary actions?
2. How often do I send the same students for disciplinary actions?
3. What messages am I communicating to the students who are the recipients of these actions?
4. What messages am I communicating to their classmates?
5. Is the behavior of my students getting better? How do I know? If it is not getting better, why not?
6. Do I dispense disciplinary referrals fairly on the basis of race and gender?
7. Are disciplinary actions therapeutic or simply punitive?
8. Do I distinguish culturally specific behaviors from behavioral inadequacies?
9. If students have substantial behavioral differences, have I taught them the skills that they need to know?
10. Am I punishing students for my lack of skill in effective behavior management?
11. Do I punish students because of my lack of skill in effective instruction?

When teachers honestly face themselves, they begin to see how intertwined their lives are with their students and with others, and as Banks (Banks & Tucker, 1998) suggests, teachers become transformed. As teachers become increasingly aware of the critical role that they can play in helping CLD students with disabilities, the students may become more adaptive in their behavior and more successful in school, although researchers have not yet empirically documented this outcome. Not only are culturally responsive teachers caring, but they are also resourceful, persistent, and committed to their students. They try out a variety of strategies in the interest of their students until they achieve the desired results (Gay, 2000, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION WITHIN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOMS

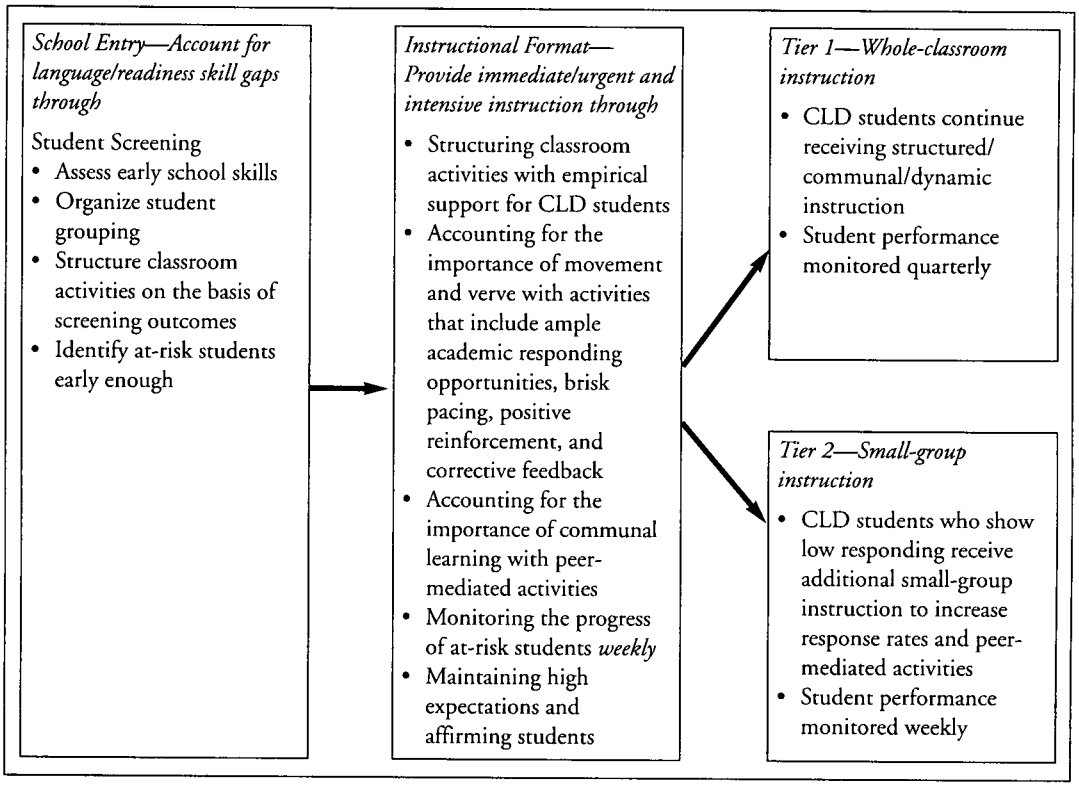
Some researchers contend that effective teachers of CLD students should use active direct instruction that encompasses a number of principles of effective instruction, including the following: (a) Intervening early to address readiness limitations and the need for intensive interventions; (b) providing complete, clear, and measurable learning objectives; (c) screening students' school entry skills and progressively monitoring the growth of their learning; and (d) providing structured classroom activities that enhance active student responding, incorporate a quick instructional pace, and provide positive corrective feedback to students (Fuchs et al., 2005; Heward, 1994, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994). An additional feature often recommended for CLD learners is communal learning environments, because such environments affirm and support family and social orientations common among these groups (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005; Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006).

Culturally Responsive Classrooms Reflect a Sense of Urgency

Culturally responsive teachers are sensitive to the linguistic and behavioral skill gaps that many CLD learners bring to school and recognize that good intensive instruction can prevent or minimize disabilities for these students. The sense of urgency for creating culturally responsive classrooms is particularly evident with the increasingly

FIGURE 1

Components of an Effective Instructional Model for Culturally Responsive Classrooms



growing number of ELLs in the public schools. The ELLs have the highest dropout rate of all students, high levels of poverty, low achievement scores, and a large mobility rate (McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, & D'Emilio, 2005). Overstating the importance of reducing these risks and increasing student academic achievement, regardless of language status, is impossible.

Figure 1 gives a visual representation of an instructional model whose emphasis is on prevention, effective instruction, and pupil monitoring. The first important step in preventing school failure for CLD students is to identify academic and behavioral risk markers as early as possible and to intervene immediately (Kame'enui et al., 2006). The basis for this urgency is research findings that indicate that low-income CLD students begin their formal schooling behind their more affluent peers in language and readiness skills (e.g., Coyne, Kame'enui, & Carnine, 2007; Torgesen, 2002). That is, their vocabulary knowledge and verbal ability are limited, they have less experience with complicated syntax, and they have limited background knowledge. All these skills are vital and are prerequisites for reading comprehension by the end of third grade (Torgesen, 2004; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). For ELLs, however, the extraneous influence of another language can either be an impediment or a facilitator to English literacy development (Lesaux & Siegel, 2003). It is arguably even more challenging for ELLs to develop English literacy skills than it is for English native speakers, since ELLs need to acquire the same range of word-level and text-level skills, regardless of their school entry point and foundation in linguistic precursors (August & Shanahan, 2006).

What is even more alarming is that CLD learners, including ELLs, systematically fall further behind as they move through the grades (Farkas, 2003; Hart & Risley, 1995, 1999). The sense of urgency is evident in research that Farkas reported and in the most recent outcomes of the national reading report cards. According to Farkas, African Americans, for example, are 1 year behind European Americans at 1st grade but are 4

years behind by 12th grade. The most recent federal reading report card (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2005) indicated that 48% of African American students and 44% of Hispanic students read below the basic level. Between-group comparisons of fourth-grade Caucasian students and students of each minority group have shown that the achievement gap from 1992 to 2005 has not decreased substantially. For instance, the gap between Caucasian and Hispanic students decreased only by 1 scale score point, thereby resulting in a 26-point difference in 2005. Similarly, the score gap between Caucasian and African American fourth-grade students decreased from 32 to 29 points.

If CLD learners are disproportionately behind when they enter school and continue to lag academically behind their White peers, then culturally responsive instruction dictates that we must intervene as early as possible with a sense of intensity and urgency to remedy existing skill gaps and prevent further loss. This intervention is especially urgent when considering research that indicates that students who fail to reach grade level in reading by the end of third grade are unlikely to ever catch up (Juel, 1988). These learners need the best possible instruction at the earliest possible point in time (Lyon & Fletcher, 2001).

Research during the past decade offers some promising strategies for preventing school failure for CLD learners. For instance, in their 4-year model demonstration project, Bursuck et al. (2004) implemented a multilayered approach with explicit code-based instruction in three ethnically diverse high-poverty schools. They also used a fourth ethnically diverse school for comparison. After targeting at-risk kindergarten students and providing explicit instruction over a 2-year period, these authors found that at the end of Grade 1, only 5.9% of students were at risk on decoding measures, compared with 24.7% in the comparison school. At the end of Grade 2, 35.6% of the target students were still at risk on oral reading fluency, in contrast to 63% for the comparison group. Musti-Rao and Cartledge (in press) used similar strategies of explicit, intensive small-group instruction with seven African American kindergarten students and found that all the students made progress, with four of them achieving benchmark status after only 2 1/2 to 4 months of intensive instruction in phonological awareness. In a similar but larger quasi-experimental study, Yurick (2006) found that 38% of 61 CLD high-risk kindergarten students met benchmark by the end of the study. Another important finding was that 28% of their higher performing classmates had regressed over the course of the study, compared with only 4% of the treatment students. These researchers concluded that carefully designed instruction with explicit emphasis on phonological and alphabetic skills can potentially reduce, if not prevent, reading failure in subsequent grades.

Providing explicit, intensive, systematic, phonological awareness instruction within the context of well-balanced literacy core instruction significantly benefits ELLs. In their 3-year longitudinal study, Lesaux and Siegel (2003) investigated the developmental reading patterns of students with limited to no English proficiency. Specifically, these researchers examined the effects of phonological awareness (in kindergarten) and phonics instruction (in Grade 1) on the reading, spelling, phonological processing, and memory of ELLs and non-ELLs. Results showed that by Grade 2, the performance of ELL students was significantly better than that of their non-ELL peers on a series of word reading, spelling, and arithmetic measures. Also, risk classification results showed that 23.8% of non-ELLs were at risk in kindergarten, whereas 37.2% of ELLs were at risk. By the end of Grade 2, only 4.2% of non-ELLs were at risk, compared with 3.72% of ELLs. Lesaux and Siegel concluded that the acquisition of letter-sound correspondence in English for early reading depends on such factors as instruction and individual differences, as opposed to fluency and oral language proficiency with English. Congruent with their outcomes is the finding from the meta-analysis of the National Literacy Panel (NLP) on the instructional variables to be incorporated in the literacy instruction for ELLs (August & Shanahan, 2006). According to the NLP, core classroom instruction that emphasizes the big ideas of beginning reading (e.g., phonological awareness, alphabetics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and text comprehension) has a positive impact on the reading development of ELLs. However, in addition to covering these ideas during classroom time, the panel also recommended

making instructional accommodations to ELLs to help them benefit maximally from the English literacy instruction. Limited research exists on determining the accommodations that are effective; however, empirical evidence indicates that culturally responsive classrooms should provide explicit, intensive code-based instruction to CLD learners, including ELLs, at the earliest possible time.

Culturally Responsive Classrooms Are Alive With High Levels of Pupil Academic Responding

The basis of effective instruction in culturally responsive classrooms is empirically validated and culturally relevant principles. The first instructional principle that enhances student achievement is active student responding. Greenwood, Hart, Walker, and Risley (1994) argued that the skill gaps of poor CLD students in urban schools are at least partly a function of fewer opportunities for active academic student responding. In a longitudinal study (infancy through third grade) that included children from upper, middle, and low socioeconomic groups, Greenwood and his colleagues found that low-income children had fewer home-based literacy experiences, which underscores the previously noted urgency for intense and effective classroom instruction. Furthermore, these researchers found that the CLD students from low-income families spent significantly less daily time in the classroom actively engaged in academic subjects. The work of Good and Nichols (2001), which supports this finding, indicates that students deemed to be less capable had lower academic response rates. Thus, effective culturally responsive instruction actively promotes high rates of observable and measurable student responses (e.g., words per minute read aloud, math facts completed correctly, comprehension questions answered). Heward (2006) gives several strategies for active student responding. These strategies include response cards, choral responding, guided notes, and so forth. Researchers have found that high rates of academic responding are associated with increases in correct responding and reductions in disruptive behavior for urban CLD learners (Gardner, Heward, & Grossi, 1994; Lambert, Cartledge, Lo, & Heward, 2006).

Effective Instruction in Culturally Responsive Classrooms Is Appropriately Paced

A second principle that relates to high levels of academic responding is instructional pacing. Pace refers to the time between the student's response and the presentation of the next task. A brisk instructional pace should include a 3-s interval from student response to the next teacher question (Heward, 1994, 2003). Maintaining a brisk instructional pace not only improves student learning but also helps to decrease off-task and disruptive behaviors. For example, a number of research investigations have examined the effects of a slow teaching pace versus a fast one on student academic responses (Carnine, 1976; Gilbertson & Bluck, 2006; Skinner, Smith, & McLean, 1994). Converging evidence reveals that fast-paced instruction produces more learning trials presented by the teacher, more responses by students during instructional time, and higher student response accuracy (Heward, 2003). For instance, Skinner et al. compared the effects of fast-paced and slow-paced teaching on sight-word learning for students with behavioral disorders and learning skill gaps. After controlling for reinforcement and number of learning trials, these researchers found that both interventions were equally effective; however, a quicker pace allowed for more learning opportunities and increased on-task behavior. Because researchers have obtained mixed outcomes for ELLs, a result that appears to favor slower-paced instruction for such students, future research should examine the differential effects of pace for this particular population (Gilbertson & Bluck).

Researchers have empirically validated a brisk teaching pace, which appears to have cultural relevance for some CLD learners. Boykin et al. (2005), for example, speaks of movement and verve (physical stimulation) as important Afrocultural themes, which typically do not align with mainstreamed classrooms. Movement and the tendency to engage in more than one task simultaneously (e.g., reading and writing while walking) were salient themes for low-income African Americans but were not commonly employed instructional practices in their classrooms (Boykin et al., 2005; Boykin et al., 2006). As a matter of

fact, Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003) report research indicating that teachers are more likely to perceive African American males as being aggressive or needing special education services if they displayed a characteristic African American movement style of walking with a stroll. Boykin et al.'s research, along with the studies on active student responding and pacing, suggests that strategies of purposeful movement may be especially effective with students from culturally diverse backgrounds, such as African American students.

Effective Culturally Responsive Classrooms Provide Timely Feedback

A third principle of effective instruction is the delivery of feedback, which consists of error correction and positive reinforcement. When CLD students make mistakes, teachers need to correct their errors immediately, frequently, explicitly, and directly. Providing the right modeling and prompting is extremely important for CLD students during the acquisition stage. High levels of academic responding are useful only if students are responding accurately. Otherwise, students simply have more time to practice mistakes, which lead to further academic failure. Furthermore, feedback in the form of charts and graphs enables students to visualize their progress and can motivate them, in addition to being instructive (Cartledge & Lo, 2006). As students move toward fluency, instructional feedback should include appropriate modeling and more practice opportunities to help students reach a desired level of proficiency (McCollin & O'Shea, 2005; Van Houten, 1984).

Effective Culturally Responsive Classrooms Provide Constant Academic Monitoring

The constant monitoring of the progress of CLD students with and at risk for disabilities is essential for student achievement and is the fourth principle for culturally effective instruction. Effective culturally responsive teachers link their explicit instruction with student performance. Demie (2005), for example, found that one of the key features contributing to the academic achievement of Black Caribbean students was the use of student progress-monitoring data to track their performance as well as to evaluate school practices. Tracking student performance on a constant basis requires using brief, short, valid assessments that enable teachers to obtain a comprehensive and reliable picture of their students' skill strengths and weaknesses.

Curriculum-based measurements (CBMs; Deno, 1992), which have been well researched, appear to be valid instruments for this purpose, particularly for CLD students. Furthermore, CBM can be an integral part of assessing a student's response to instruction because it distinguishes between ineffective instruction and unacceptable student performance. For instance, after a child receives research-based core instruction implemented with integrity, if he or she performs below a performance criterion and has lower growth than his or her peers, the child's performance is unacceptable and warrants specially designed instruction to meet his or her needs. Conversely, if most of the class shows limited growth and fails to meet performance indicators after receiving classroom instruction, educators can assume that the curriculum content and instructional delivery are ineffective, so that a change in instruction is necessary to increase student responding. CBM procedures are flexible and adaptable enough that educators can implement them across a variety of curriculum areas and can use them as academic gauges for determining the amount of student growth resulting from instruction (Fuchs, Fuchs & Speece, 2002). Through such monitoring, teachers can implement a multitier instructional model, whereby those learners who still do not respond within the classroom setting can receive additional small-group instruction (see Figure 1).

Another extremely important advantage is that CBMs are likely to avoid the psychological threat that appears to undermine the standardized testing performance of some CLD learners (Steele, 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1995). In a series of studies, Steele and Aronson found that even when educators matched CLD and White students on such variables as educational background (e.g., grades and SAT scores), certain CLD students performed less well than White students. The authors speculated that cultural stereotypes of intellectual inferiority stymied these

CLD students (e.g., African American and Hispanic American students; Aronson, 2004). That is, these stereotypes, embedded from a very early age, psychologically block the students' performance when the students are in an evaluative situation—a "stereotype threat." The researchers tested this theory with equally talented African American students and European American students and found a substantial improvement in the test performance of the African American students only when the "threat" of assessing innate ability was removed. Aronson reports that numerous studies have verified the hypothesis of stereotype threat. He recommends that classrooms for affected CLD students emphasize cooperative structures rather than competitive ones. He also advises teaching students that intelligence is not a fixed entity; instead, students can stretch their abilities and performance through effort and hard work. Specifically, Aronson suggested that "we teach students to reconsider the nature of intelligence, to think of their minds as muscles that get strengthened and expanded—*smarter—with hard work*" (p. 17). He reported research outcomes where this instruction resulted in dramatic improvements in the standardized performance of middle school CLD students.

Effective Culturally Responsive Classrooms Build Communities of Learners

The fifth principle of culturally effective instruction pertains to the classroom learning environment. Borrowing from the collectivistic or communal orientation typical of the cultural background of CLD learners (e.g., Boykin et al., 2005; Boykin et al., 2006; Cartledge & Milburn, 1996), Ladson-Billings (1994) proposed that, within culturally relevant classrooms, teachers should work to create positive environments where there is a community of learners, focused on helping others as well as themselves. She states the following:

> Culturally relevant teaching fosters the kinds of social interactions in the classroom that support the individual in the group context. Students feel a part of a collective effort designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence. As members of an extended family, the students assist, support, and encourage one another. The entire group rises and falls together. Thus it is in everyone's best interest to ensure that the others in the group are successful. There is little reward for individual achievement at the expense of others . . . . Culturally relevant teaching honors the students' sense of humanity and dignity. . . . Self-worth and self-concept is promoted in a very basic way. (p. 76)

Teachers must focus on establishing a connection with each child, as well as emphasizing the responsibility that all children have for one another. Gay (2002) also spoke of communities of learners: "In these communities students pool their intellectual resources and work diligently to help each other learn. They are taught that the learning of each individual is not complete until all members of the class have learned to the best of their ability" (p. 622). Likewise, Ladson-Billings (1994) documented such communities in her qualitative studies of culturally relevant classrooms.

One effective instructional strategy for overcoming challenges when teaching CLD students is involving students in their own learning. Extensive research on peer-mediated learning interventions has demonstrated strong positive effects on the academic and social development of CLD students (e.g., Cochran, Feng, Cartledge, & Hamilton, 1993; Kourea, Cartledge & Musti-Rao, 2007). Peer tutoring is a widely known structured instructional system in which students pair into dyads and take specific roles (tutor and tutee). Their roles include teaching each other academic materials and providing corrective feedback and positive reinforcement for correct responses. In general, peer tutoring increases students' on-task behavior and sets the stage for academic student responding. Peer tutoring enhances student motivation and increases the opportunities for students to obtain individualized help and encouragement. Additionally, peer tutoring is a viable approach for including students with special needs in mainstream settings and increasing positive social relationships with students without disabilities (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1998). Peer tutoring creates more personal interactions between teachers and students, in addition to providing a collaborative framework that teaches

TABLE 1

Benefits of Building a Community of Learners

Teachers	*Tutors*	*Tutees*
1. Teacher's role changes to an administrative and consultative role.	1. Tutors can teach partner in a highly effective manner (e.g., provide many opportunities for active student responding, corrective feedback, and reinforcement to their peers). Tutors often aim for higher efficacy because they believe that greater efforts may result in achievement equal to that of a tutor.	1. Tutees benefit socially; can more openly express opinions, ask questions, and risk untested solutions; develop positive attitudes in peer relations and motivation for learning.
2. Teachers can spend more time in individualized or small-group instruction.	2. Tutors benefit academically by teaching.	2. Tutees benefit academically by demonstrating gains in subject content area.
3. Teachers can include students with disabilities in general classrooms.	3. Tutors can work on an individualized intensive one-to-one basis with a tutee without having the rest of the class work on independent seatwork.	3. ELLs and students with disabilities improve academically.

students that they need to work to accomplish an instructional goal (Maheady, 1998). Finally, evidence also indicates that peer tutoring results in more academic engaged time (Lo & Cartledge, 2004; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000) and greater academic achievement for ELL minority students (Greenwood, Arreaga-Mayer, Utley, Gavin, & Terry, 2001). Kalkowski (1995) posited that peer tutoring has been effective for so many years because tutors and tutees speak a more similar language than do teachers and students. The three main benefits of peer tutoring are learning academic skills, developing social behaviors and classroom discipline, and enhancing peer relations.

Peer tutoring is not the only form of peer-mediated learning that is appropriate for culturally responsive classrooms. Teachers might also employ cooperative learning activities, buddy systems, or other formats that more closely reflect their culturally specific communal styles. This recommendation resides in the research documenting the preference of CLD groups for cooperative formats (Boykin et al., 2006), but more research on varied communal formats would be beneficial. Learning communities yield benefits for both students and teachers, as indicated in Table 1.

ADDRESSING SOCIAL BEHAVIORS WITHIN CULTURALLY COMPETENT CLASSROOMS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Culturally Responsive Classrooms Are Disciplined

Culturally responsive classrooms for students with disabilities provide disciplined environments rather than punitive ones. Becoming a disciplined, socially appropriate individual is a valued aspect of the human experience and an essential component of our formal and informal education (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). Disproportionate disciplinary actions for CLD learners with disabilities have been a long-standing and contentious issue. Evidence indicates that educators are more likely to suspend or expel these students or give them more restrictive classroom placements (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Lo & Cartledge, 2007; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al.,

2006; Skiba et al., 2008). African American children, in particular, receive more disciplinary actions with harsher penalties than their European American counterparts (Skiba et al., 2002; Verdugo, 2002). Even more disturbing is the realization that these harsh punishments are not only ineffective (e.g., Krezmien et al.) but relate more consistently than any other factor to special education disproportionality (Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005). Excluded students lose valuable opportunities to learn critical academic and social skills.

Educators frequently associate discipline with punishment, but culturally responsive disciplined environments are places where students learn to become disciplined, so that discipline becomes something that students possess rather than something imposed on them (Brendtro & Long, 1997). In these environments, students not only willingly engage in learning (Smith & Misra, 1992), but they also embrace their responsibility to contribute to the discipline of the classroom and the general well-being of all its members.

Excluded students lose valuable opportunities to learn critical academic and social skills.

Culturally responsive discipline molds socially appropriate behavior through systematic planning, teaching, and evaluation. Reductive procedures may be part of a discipline plan, but they should not be the primary or dominant component of the plan; rather, educators should use them sparingly as a means to strengthen an existing largely positive plan. Uppermost in any discipline plan is to encourage the student to want to engage in the socially appropriate behavior. The definition of a culturally responsive disciplined classroom may vary; but at the very least, key features need to include cultures of fairness, attitudes of caring and commitment to teaching CLD students with disabilities, and teachers skilled in implementing culturally responsive behavioral interventions.

Culturally Responsive Classrooms Are Fair

Fairness is critical to culturally responsive classroom discipline and behavior development for CLD learners. One aspect of fairness is to make certain that behavioral consequences match the infraction. Educators may direct a student who spills milk while inappropriately playing in the lunchroom to clean up the milk, clean up other areas of the lunchroom, and miss most of recess, which typically follows the lunch period. A full day of in-school or at-home suspension is probably too harsh, especially since the student will miss valuable learning time and nothing is likely to occur during these suspensions that attempts to teach the student appropriate ways to conduct himself or herself during the lunch period. While the student cleans the lunchroom, however, educators can prompt the student physically and verbally on appropriate ways to act during the lunch period.

As previously noted, students from diverse backgrounds often receive a greater quantity of disciplinary actions and disciplinary actions that are more severe than those that their non-CLD peers receive. Weinstein et al. (2004) cautioned that disciplinary actions must not have discriminatory overtones or project privilege for select groups. They noted, as an example, the different school actions that permit European American males to wear pants with holes in the thighs with impunity, whereas African American males receive 10-day suspensions if the straps of their overalls are not snapped. When young people begin to perceive this type of injustice for their in-group members, it not only provokes understandable anger but also may trigger the process of psychological disengagement. Schmader, Major, and Gramzow (2001) defined psychological disengagement according to the degree to which students devalued the importance of education and discounted the validity of the evaluations made of them. The authors studied the predictive factors of psychological disengagement among European American, African American, and Latino American college students and noted the salience of ethnic injustice, that is, the degree to which the individual viewed standards as having a clear bias favoring the advantaged group. For African Amer-

icans, and to a lesser extent, Hispanic Americans, beliefs about ethnic injustice played a more important role in triggering psychological disengagement than doing poorly in school. In contrast, European Americans registered psychological disengagement mainly when doing poorly in school.

For school-age students, the process of psychological disengagement may begin early in their schooling. Noguera (2003) proposed that "at a relatively young age students may have as many negative experiences in school that they soon begin to recognize that education is not working for them and will not provide them with access to socially desirable rewards" (p. 343). Noguera also contended that schools for many CLD students, especially those with the greatest needs, focus so much on behavior control and dispensing punitive consequences that educators fail to realize that these administrative actions are counterproductive and lead students to reject the standards of the school and pursue practices of cultural inversion. Furthermore, because many of these students "realize that the trajectory their education has placed them on is leading to nowhere, many simply lose the incentive to adhere to school norms" (Noguera, p. 343). Disciplinary patterns send powerful messages to both CLD students and to the larger society. Frequent and excessive punishment for African American males, for instance, not only reinforces stereotypes of the criminality of African American males but also convinces these students that the schools are not able or willing to address their specific needs.

Culturally Responsive Classrooms Provide Evidence-Based Proactive Systems

The teacher factor relative to management skills is extremely important. The poor performance of many CLD students is at least partly a function of being in classrooms with inexperienced and unskilled teachers (Kozleski, Sobel, & Taylor, 2003; Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, & Wu, 2003). Students viewed as troublemakers in classrooms of relatively unskilled teachers are often appropriately engaged in classrooms of more competent teachers (Noguera, 2003). Since successful teachers are those who can employ evidence-based practices in culturally responsive ways, teachers need to develop skills in being proactive. Instead of focusing on ways to remove students from the classroom, teachers needs to emphasize ways of *preventing* problem behaviors, teaching critical skills that are not yet part of the child's repertoire, and keeping the student academically engaged within the classroom. For example, positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS; Sugai & Horner, 2005) is a proactive positive approach designed to create positive school and classroom environments in which every student can participate and learn. This approach is particularly appropriate for CLD learners, who too often experience zero-tolerance, punitive policies (Duda & Utley, 2005). Researchers have shown that PBIS is effective with a variety of populations, reducing disciplinary referrals and increasing the successful participation of students in the schools. Lassen, Steele, and Sailor (2006) report findings from PBIS interventions within an inner-city, low-income CLD school district. Over a 3-year period, the researchers found reductions in disciplinary referrals and increases in math and reading scores.

Instead of focusing on ways to remove students from the classroom, teachers need to emphasize ways of preventing problem behaviors, teaching critical skills that are not yet part of the child's repertoire, and keeping the student academically engaged within the classroom.

Educators can adapt the basic procedures of PBIS according to the needs of the CLD populations. For instance, a fundamental premise at the primary level is to establish a positive and rewarding school climate, articulated in a mission statement of behavioral expectations (e.g., mutual respect, kindness, and cooperation). As previously noted, one of the goals in culturally responsive classrooms is to create a community of learners in which students learn to care for and provide for one another. School personnel communicate to the students that they care for them and model for students, in word and deed, respect for and appreciation of the students.

Educators can make PBIS more culturally relevant by appealing to the students' heritage or cultural background. For example, one African American school in Seattle, Washington, used modified Kwanzaa principles as the basis of its social behavior principles (Gay, 2000). To promote a positive attitude toward school, the school used the first principle of *umoja* (unity), that is, having school spirit and good things to say about the school. According to PBIS, educators then operationally define school behavioral expectations and positively state them. Educators need to structure these behavioral rules in a way that tells students what they need to do rather than what they should not do (e.g., "Make positive statements to and about your schoolmates" as opposed to "Don't put down your schoolmates").

Culturally Responsive Classrooms Include Evidence-Based Social Skill Instruction

Students who do not respond to schoolwide or classwide interventions need more direct instruction or *secondary* interventions to learn the desired behaviors. A teacher may use reductive procedures to stop a student from talking out, for instance, but the student still has not learned appropriate ways to solicit the teacher's attention. The student needs direct social skill instruction so that he or she appropriately attracts the teacher's attention and becomes more likely to receive reinforcement than punishment in the classroom. One model for teaching social skills is essentially to tell the student what the behavior is, show the student how to perform the behavior, give the student ample opportunities to practice the behavior with corrective and reinforcing feedback, and program for behavior maintenance and transfer (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995, 1996). Educators have extensively and successfully used this model to teach social skills to many populations, including urban African American primary-aged males (Middleton & Cartledge, 1995); urban students with behavior disorders (Lo, Loe, & Cartledge, 2002); middle-school urban students with behavior disorders (Blake, Wang, Cartledge, & Gardner, 2000); and adolescent urban males with behavior disorders (Moore, Cartledge, & Heckaman, 1995).

If social skills instruction is to be culturally relevant, it needs to reflect the lifestyle and experiences of the CLD learner. For example, in a social skills instructional program for African American males, Hammond (1991) centered the instructional vignettes on events common to these males' lives (e.g., stolen high-fashion shoes). A second factor important to the cultural relevance of social skills instruction is the use of models from the learner's cultural group. Social skills instructional groups should be heterogeneous, if possible, and should include competent peers with the same cultural background as the targeted students. Peers can be effective social skills trainers (e.g., Blake et al., 2000), especially since students are often more receptive to messages from their peer group than from adults (Cartledge & Milburn, 1996). Some of the preceding studies used trained peers to teach the social skills to their classmates, and the peer trainers often made more behavioral gains than their trainees.

It is also important to incorporate the learner's language into the instructional scripts, where appropriate (e.g., Moore et al., 1995), and to involve parents to support the instruction (e.g., Middleton & Cartledge, 1995). In the Moore et al. study, educators permitted urban males to use their own language and to stage social skills vignettes within their desired social context. The classroom teacher, who provided the training, contributed to the cultural relevance through her skillful ability to relate to and communicate with her students. Middleton and Cartledge contacted low-income African American parents weekly to discuss the social skills lessons and to remind parents to prompt and reinforce their children on the skills taught that week. Hammond and Yung (1993) verify the importance of parents as a means for making social skills instruction culturally relevant; parents can be important allies and teach their children how to assert themselves in socially appropriate and nonaggressive ways to achieve desired goals.

Culturally Responsive Classrooms Use Individualized Behavior Plans

The most troubled students (i.e., students with and at risk for behavior disorders) in our schools can benefit from more intensive, individualized

interventions, called *tertiary interventions.* Again, the focus is on teaching and developing adaptive behaviors, as opposed to exclusionary or punitive practices. Educators have successfully used functional behavior assessments (FBAs) and behavior intervention plans (BIPs; Burke, Hagan-Burke, & Sugai, 2003) to determine the function that a disruptive behavior serves for a student and ways of teaching alternative behaviors to replace the disruptive behavior. Lo and Cartledge (2006) effectively used tertiary interventions to increase the classroom success of four African American elementary school males with or at risk for disabilities. Educators taught the students to monitor their own behavior and to solicit the teacher's attention appropriately to reduce off-task behavior and classroom disruption. The students learned to display more patience, to request the teacher's assistance appropriately, to display a sign for help if the teacher was unavailable, to keep working until the teacher was available, and to thank the teacher when given assistance. Well-designed and well-implemented plans should enable learners to make progress and should either rule out the need for special education placements or permit students to move to less restrictive environments.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

An obvious implication of the vignette presented at the beginning of this article is the need for our schools and classroom teachers to recognize their role in preventing and minimizing disabilities, as well as responding to students' skill gaps. CLD learners present the greatest risk and have the greatest need for superior schooling practices that will enable them to overcome these risk factors and maximize their potential. Educators need to initiate interventions for these children as early as possible, including during the preschool years. Thus, the principles of cultural competence, effective instruction, and behavior development need to be part of the preparation of preschool teachers (particularly Head Start teachers) and K–12 teachers, including both general and special educators. Educators need to place special emphasis on the skills and qualifications of preschool and primary-grade teachers. Although CLD learners cannot afford a single year of poor schooling, the primary grades are critical and set the trajectory for future academic and social responding.

The dramatic increases in culturally diverse pupil populations, particularly ELL students, make cultural competence imperative for school personnel. Culturally indifferent teachers, who are unaware of their biases and how these beliefs affect their teaching, are educational liabilities. Schools now have greater accountability for CLD student outcomes, such as adequate yearly progress (AYP; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001), special education disproportionality (Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004; IDEA), and disciplinary disproportionality. These conditions bring into question the quality of education for CLD learners and lead to greater scrutiny of classroom teachers and their practices. Improvements in cultural awareness and competence will enable teachers to be more introspective—closely examining their classroom practices and acting in ways that clearly benefit CLD students.

To be successful in teaching CLD students with and at risk for disabilities, teachers need to master the skills of effective instruction. Empirical evidence indicates that the strategies that provide for clearly specified goals, high rates of academic responding, and progressive monitoring are effective and particularly valuable for CLD learners with or at risk for disabilities. As described previously, effective instruction enables teachers to be focused, clearly directed, and systematic in their teaching. Teachers of CLD students need preparation in this methodology, and these competencies should be key criteria for determining highly qualified teachers.

School systems need to commit to creating more positive environments for all their students, especially CLD learners with or at risk for disabilities. Systems that affirm, nurture, and encourage these students are essential, and educators need to deemphasize punitive consequences. The psychological impact of the extensive punitive practices on students is powerful and potentially destructive. Educators need to pay more attention to the strengths of CLD students to help them become more productive and socially appropriate in their behavior. All teachers can benefit from extensive

training and coaching in creating disciplined classrooms and teaching social skills (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2003/2004). This training should include explicit courses in teacher preparation programs, regular features of inservice professional development, and participation in university–school partnerships (Harry, 2008).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Preliminary studies indicate that early interventions can potentially mitigate or minimize disabilities for high-risk CLD learners. Most of the existing work has focused on kindergarten or primary-grade students. During the previous decade or so, researchers have placed significant emphasis on identifying, assessing, and intervening with at-risk CLD learners for academic and behavioral gaps. Less research, however, has focused on CLD intermediate-age and secondary-age students who have already been labeled and are receiving special education services (McCray & Garcia, 2002). What types of culturally responsive teaching strategies are appropriate for these older CLD special education students? Do specific instructional strategies produce better student outcomes for certain ethnic special education groups? If so, what are they? Should older ELL special education students receive individualized and specialized instruction in their native language or in standardized English? Of note, educators have also given less attention to improving outcomes of CLD students in juvenile correction facilities. What culturally responsive intervention programs exist that can improve the postsecondary outcomes of these incarcerated youth?

Determining the long-term effectiveness of culturally responsive instructional strategies requires longitudinal investigations that provide interventions to even younger children, starting with preschoolers or even toddlers. For instance, what is the impact of early academic and behavioral interventions on the elementary and high-school performance of CLD children who receive extremely limited early literacy experiences at home? Interestingly, maladaptive behaviors often begin early in the child's life; and without intervention, they systematically worsen over time (Kauffman, 2005). It would be of particular interest to study, on a longitudinal basis, the effects of behavioral interventions that began very early in the child's life. Such research could help answer important questions, such as the long-term behavioral benefits of early behavior interventions, teachers' roles in promoting the social development of CLD learners, and the most effective behavioral interventions for CLD learners with or at risk for disabilities.

Empirical evidence indicates that the strategies that provide for clearly specified goals, high rates of academic responding, and progressive monitoring are effective and particularly valuable for CLD learners with or at risk for disabilities.

Much of the research relative to culturally specific themes has been descriptive (e.g., Boykin et al., 2005), and has defined and analyzed the existence of particular cultural markers. Researchers might extend this type of inquiry to experimentally designed studies that examine the direct impact of these features on the school success of CLD learners. For instance, researchers might study classrooms for CLD learners in which curriculum content and delivery are structured for communities of learners and compare them with more traditional classrooms with students from the same cultural peer group. Of further research interest would be the classroom structure that encompasses communities of learners. As discussed previously, evidence indicates the benefits of peer-mediated interventions. Communal studies, however, might further clarify the specific parameters of such classrooms for CLD learners with special needs. Along these lines, the future research agenda might also focus on promoting vocabulary and reading development of ELL primary-grade youngsters through the use of peer-mediated interventions.

CONCLUSION

Creating culturally responsive classrooms that include developing culturally competent teachers is

a transformative process of the American educational system. The process is a time-consuming one that requires systematic, in-depth research investigations of cultural markers and intervention outcomes. An important consideration in this changing process is the linkage between classroom instruction and data-driven decision making. Assessments that are culturally fair should inform teachers about the quality and integrity of their instruction and should enable them to make changes for increasing student outcomes, a coveted end goal of education in America.

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