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A Letter from the Editor

Special education has enjoyed a long history of providing educational interventions that meet the individual needs of the students served. Meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities has become more challenging with time, as the student populations have become more diverse and needs have become more complex. The education of students with disabilities has been the subject of intense debate with regard to inclusion in statewide assessments and curriculum frameworks. The debate magnifies in intensity when the discussion includes students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds because of the difficulty associated with differentiating between performance that is attributed to a disability and performance that is attributed to race, culture, socioeconomic status, and linguistic background. Some of the reasons for the difficulties in making these performance distinctions include inadequate diagnostic tools, intervention strategies that do not bridge the diversity and disability gap, and assessment instruments that have not been validated for use with diverse populations. Our largest challenge in the coming decades will be to find ways in which we can develop better and more valid methods of intervention and means for measuring the academic progress of students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds.

Administrators of special and general education will have to not only acquire the requisite skills for working with students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds but will have to develop strategies for recruiting, training, and retaining staff that are capable of working with diverse populations. In addition, there is a cadre of professional educators already in the workforce who were trained at a time when the nation was less diverse and assimilation was the expectation. As a result, there is a need for extensive professional development activities that help professional educators acquire the tools necessary for addressing the needs of students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds and their families.

This special issue, which is dedicated to students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds, commences with Drs. Margaret McLaughlin, Alfredo Artiles, and Diana Pullin consideration of the challenges associated with transforming special education as a way of changing the school culture to accommodate more students from diverse backgrounds. Dr. Martha Thurlow and Ms. Kristin Liu provide an overview of practices and the reporting of data with regard to the inclusion and performance of IEP and LEP students on state and district assessments. Drs. Alba Ortiz and James Yates offer a framework to guide providers serving English language learners with disabilities. Dr. Festus Obiakor shares guidelines for transforming teaching and learning to improve the achievement of students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds in inclusive settings. Shifting the focus to families, Dr. Brown-Chidsey, Mr. Julio Gonzalez-Martinez, and I look at the importance of forging partnerships with families of students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds. Lastly, Dr. Carolyn Guess provides a special education directors point of view for *Case in Point* and looks at the implications for schools serving students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds.

The CASE Executive Committee and I always welcome your feedback regarding *JSEL*. We hope you enjoy this issue of the journal.

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Challenges for the Transformation of Special Education in the 21st Century:

Rethinking Culture in School Reform

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- Increasing diversity in America's schools will inevitably challenge special education systems as more students need additional assistance to progress in the curriculum.

- Special education administrators will need greater understanding of the historical role of special education and other targeted programs as a means of reducing the pressure in general education.

- Current policies and practices in schools are not based on an understanding of how culture shapes student development and teacher's work and, as a result, forces schools to classify and categorize students into specialized programs in order to meet their unique learning needs.

- We argue for whole school reorganization that reflects cultural understanding and permits flexibility in the use of resources and is guided by clear accountability for student performance that provides all students equal access to challenging curricula and results in better outcomes.

Special education in the U.S. has long been entangled with issues of student diversity and equality of educational opportunity. Special education is one of several programs that have been developed in response to the needs of specific groups of children who were failing to learn in public schools. Federal and state special education policies are founded on the rights of students with disabilities to access a public education. However, understanding how concepts of disability interact with students' racial, cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity is one of the biggest challenges faced by special educators. These challenges are likely to become even greater with the increasing diversity in U.S. public schools. In this article we discuss how ethnic and racial diversity has shaped the development of special education in America's schools and we acknowledge the inadequacy of past public policy strategies aimed at decreasing minority disproportionate representation in special education. We also assert that the problem will only be solved through rethinking the notion of culture that informs programs and reforms and through the design of a new and more flexible system of services focused on helping each student reach his or her highest level of achievement.

Diversity in Today's Schools

If there were any doubts about the changing face of U.S. schools, results of the 2000 U.S. census should have dispelled them. In 1950, 86% of the K-12 population was white. By 2000, that proportion dropped to 65% while the proportion of Latino students grew from 2 to 15% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Furthermore, 31% of minority students have difficulty speaking English. Blacks and Latinos are especially likely to live in neighborhoods where educational and economic opportunities are the most limited and where these problems are worsening, rather than improving with the nation's economic robustness (Ladd & Hansen, 1999). Disparities in wealth parallel those in achievement. Trends on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) depict an increase in the overall reading achievement gap between the highest poverty and

lowest poverty schools from 27 points in 1988 to a 40-point gap in 1999. In math, the gap increased from 20 to 29 points (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Efforts to close the performance gap between White, Black, and Latino students have been confounded with issues of poverty. The past 20 years have brought considerable wealth and economic opportunity for many, yet vast economic disparities remain within our society. Between 1980 and 1997, the proportion of White students living in poverty hovered around 15%, while the rates for Latino children rose to 40% and for Black children, to 45% (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1998).

Federal Strategies to Achieve Educational Equity

Improving the educational outcomes of students living in poverty has been a major goal of federal programs since the passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Title I of the Act has been the centerpiece of federal efforts to close the achievement gap between poor and more affluent children. In FY2001 the program provided $9.5 billion to schools to improve learning for students at risk of failure (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In 1997/98, 12.5 million students were in programs receiving Title I funding. Of these, 29% were Black and 29% Latino, and most of the funds (46%) were concentrated in schools where 75-100% of the student population were eligible for free and reduced lunch (U.S. Department of Education, 2000a). These "high-poverty" schools comprise 16% of all public schools.

Title I reflects a larger national strategy to close the persistent gap in achievement between different racial groups. Standards-based reform, the dominant model of educational reform of U.S. schools, represents the country's most recent effort to create educational equity. The reform strategy includes establishing high standards and high-stakes assessments and requires greater accountability for schools and students for higher levels of performance. Setting high common standards and increasing public accountability appear across federal education policies. Under Title I of the Elementary Secondary

Education Act (ESEA), a school must provide opportunities for *all* children, including those with disabilities, to meet the state's student performance standards and have yearly assessments to account for how those standards are met. Similar requirements for participation in assessments and public accountability as well as access to the general education curriculum now exist within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The changes in special education policy are motivated by a desire to improve educational outcomes of students with disabilities. Aligning special education with standards-driven reform offers an opportunity to refine the goals and functions of special education within public education, but may also exacerbate problems with disproportionate identification of linguistically or culturally diverse students as "disabled."

Capacity of Educational Personnel

Coupled with new demands for higher levels of student performance is the challenge of obtaining educated teachers who can teach an increasingly pluralistic student population. A well-qualified teaching force is at the heart of any effort to enhance educational opportunity (NCTAF, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Over 2 million new teachers will be needed in the next ten years (NCES, 2001). By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, nearly one-half the nation's student population will be students of color, including native, migrant, and immigrant children, with an increasing number of non-English-speaking white immigrant children from Eastern Europe (NCTAF, 1996; NCES, 1997b).

The extent to which there will be a sufficiently well-qualified teaching force to address the needs of the nation's increasingly diverse students is a significant concern on many fronts. The proportion of minority teachers is decreasing in comparison to the proportion of minority students (Melnick & Pullin, 2000). For example, in 1993-94, Black, non-Latinos made up 16% of the public school population, but only 9% of the teaching force (NCATF, 1996; NCES, 1997a); while in 1998, Black, non-Latinos made up 17% of the public school population and only 7.3% of the teaching force (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1999; NCES, 2000). In urban districts where students

of color make up 69% of the total enrollment, only 36% of the teaching force are minorities (Urban Teacher Challenge, 2000).

Students in public schools are increasingly different in background from their teachers, who will be largely white, middle class, female, and monolingual speakers of English (Melnick & Zeichner, 1998; Melnick & Pullin, 2000). Gay (1990) noted that these differences between minority students and those who will teach them have the potential to "make achieving educational equality even more unlikely in the existing structure of schooling" due to the "social distance" between teachers and students (p. 61).

Special Education and Diverse Students

Concerns about the disproportionate representation of certain students from nonmajority cultures have dogged special education policy for decades. Efforts to remedy the problems of inappropriate special education identification of minority students, specifically Black males and English language learners, include two landmark judicial decisions (e.g. *Diana v. California Board of Education* [1970] and *Larry P. v. Riles*). Decisions from these cases provided the foundations for the nondiscriminatory assessment provisions of the IDEA. In addition, the 1997 IDEA amendments expanded existing protections against inappropriate identification of minority students. Among these are requirements that examiners ascertain that neither absence of instruction in academic skills nor limited English proficiency be determinant factors in eligibility decisions. Additional scrutiny of discriminatory assessment and related practices are also required (34 CFR 300).

Concern over disproportionate representation has resulted in the Office of Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Education monitoring overrepresentation of minority students in certain disability categories in special education for over 25 years. Two National Academy of Sciences committees and several recent national conferences have also explored the reasons why certain students, notably Black males and increasingly Latino students are disproportionately represented in special education. Despite the legal mandates and

monitoring and increasing public awareness, disproportionality continues.

The most recent Annual Report to Congress (U.S. Department of Education, 2000b) describes for the first time disability data by race and ethnicity. During the 1998/99 school year, 20.03% of all 6- to 21-year-old students served under the IDEA were Black and 13.9% were Latino. These groups represented 17.1% and 15.1% respectively of the school-age population during that school year (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1972-1998). Total percentages mask the significant cross-state variability. For example, the percent of Black students identified as eligible for special education ranged from 52.9% in one state to .38% in another. For Latino students, the range was a high of 50% to a quarter of a percent.

State demographics or natural prevalence cannot alone explain such variability. Attempts to understand the meaning of the variations, as well as the interaction among poverty, race/ethnicity, and special education identification have been thwarted by the lack of data as well as differing interpretations of the data. Recent studies provide some insight on the complexity of the interaction between the above variables. For example, Oswald et al. (1999) documented a link between school poverty level and disability placement for African American students. They found African American representation in MMR programs increased as the school poverty level increased; in contrast, African American overrepresentation in ED classes was higher in low-poverty schools. Unfortunately, we do not have empirical evidence to explain this intriguing finding.

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Furthermore, minority representation in the district seems to be related to overrepresentation. Ladner and Hammons (2001) found that primarily minority districts placed a smaller proportion of

students in special education and, districts with a predominantly White student population placed a slightly higher proportion of minority students in special education. Similarly, Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, and Higareda (in press) show how important differences in placement patterns emerge as data are disaggregated from national and district to grade levels, and from general group to subgroup levels. Specifically, although English learners are not over-identified at the national and district levels in a region serving over half a million students in California, overrepresentation was observed in the upper elementary (fourth and fifth) and secondary grades. These patterns were most noticeable in the LD and LSI categories. Moreover, a subgroup of English learners, students classified as being limited proficient in their first *and* second language were overrepresented at all grade levels. Their counterparts, students with limited proficiency in English only, fared better.

In contrast to the Ladner and Hammonds (2001) finding cited above, data recently released by the state of New York (Lawrence C. Gloeckler, Memo to Board, March 30, 2001) indicate that in general, the special education identification rate tends to be higher in districts with higher need for economic assistance from the state (e.g., poorer districts). For example, the combined identification rate for the four largest cities was 14.8%, compared with 10.6% in the districts with the most resources. Black and Latino students are overrepresented in special education, compared to their representation in total enrollment. Black students are 19.5% of all students and are 24.2% of all students with disabilities while Latino students are 17.2% of all students and 20% of all students with disabilities.

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Compared to White (8.3%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (5.5%) students with disabilities, greater percentages of Black (18.4%), Latino (11.1%), and American Indian/Alaskan Native (14.2%) students are classified as emotionally disturbed. Greater percentages of school-age minority special education students are served in separate settings compared to White students with disabilities and more are suspended out-of-school for more than ten days.

Explanations of the problem of minority disproportionate representation range from structural theories that attribute disproportionality to the marginalized status of minorities in the U.S. to assumptions about the deficits of particular students. Deficit explanations argue that poverty is rampant in minority communities and because of their exposure to poverty, minority students lack the skills and dispositions to succeed in school; hence, it is not surprising these students need specialized services. Deficit theories have dominated throughout the history of special and compensatory education and they rest on a particular vision of culture. From this perspective, culture is evidenced in the typical habits of mind and soul and other distinctive characteristics of minority groups; implicit in this view is that only minorities possess a culture.

Special Education: Enabler of Deficit Explanations

The evolution of special education programs for high incidence disabilities coincides with population diversification in the U.S. Case histories documenting the development of specialized public school classrooms and programs for students with learning and behavior problems during the past century point to the use of special education and disability categorization as a means of coping with increasing student diversity (Franklin, 1994; Hendrick & MacMillan, 1989). Hendrick and MacMillan studied the development of special education programs for students with mental retardation during the early 1900s in the Los Angeles and New York public schools. They note the increased use of grading and grouping students as a response to a heterogeneous student population brought about by the influx of immigrants and migration of rural African American populations to urban centers. Hoffman (1975) cites similar responses to students who were truant, incorrigible, or otherwise seriously behavior disordered. The ungraded "special education" classes

were developed to provide an alternative curriculum (e.g., vocational, daily living) to students who were determined to have low I.Q. and low academic performance and/or as places where students could be controlled.

Differentiated curricula and classrooms were responses to balancing the needs of diverse learners with the social goal of universal access to public education. Differentiation was seen as a means of achieving more efficient organizations and ultimately became institutionalized through public policies that targeted specific resources to distinct classes of students (e.g., Title I, special education, bilingual education). The result was the creation of separate subsystems of education that operate with their own resources, set of assumptions and regulations, and with little functional interface between them. At the same time, however, these subsystems serve crucial complementary functions. So, for example, special education assumes responsibility for those students that do not fit the demands and expectations of the general or bilingual education systems and assumes that the students' deficits result from intra-child factors or "disability." However, in today's educational environment, access to compartmentalized programs and resources is not sufficient and the boundaries between programs are becoming blurred. The depth of our commitment to educate every child to high standards is evident in public education policies and requires that we use our human and fiscal resources in ways that help all children meet the new educational demands.

To summarize, today's schools call for a broader conception of the underlying causes of low achievement and poor behavioral adjustment. The fact is that for every student, learning is an interaction among intra-child ability and the quality of the instructional environment. Separating special education from general education on the presumption that the problems rest within a child does not work for the vast majority of students served under IDEA. In fact, the instructional context is a major shaping force of student achievement. Current policy demands that resources in schools be organized to address learning problems early and intensely but within a common framework of high expectations and accountability. Thus, waiting for students to fall far enough behind or score low enough on an I.Q. measure is costly and indefensible. Further,

developing special education outside of the framework of standards and common expectations is not responsive to the demands for better outcomes.

It is evident special educators face a complex situation shaped by rapid demographic changes, a history of fragmented efforts to address the multifaceted needs of students, and a tradition of resource allocation that is restricted by labels and categories. Comprehensive and large-scale efforts will undoubtedly be needed in order to effect meaningful change. We argue that as a first step, special education must be defined as part of the continuum of general education. Special education, as traditionally organized, can enable general education to classify or otherwise move out those students, historically those who have come from nondominant cultures. As we know, this traditional approach creates a self-perpetuating cycle in which the practice of ignoring the role culture plays in academic or behavioral differences creates a situation of increasing referrals and pressures on special education to serve those who are not succeeding within a classroom, typically ethnic and linguistic minorities.

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What can we do to address this seemingly irresolvable predicament? Educators must first acknowledge and understand how culture mediates students' and educators' learning and performance in educational settings. Then, educators must use a more flexible orientation to how services and resources are utilized within a school. We focus on these two aspects that must be addressed as school administrators reconfigure services and resources to better serve the increasingly diverse student population.

Rethinking "Culture"

Efforts to address the educational needs of culturally diverse students are based on particular views of culture. The definitions of culture that inform these

efforts are not always articulated and thus, it is not surprising that multiple reforms based on partial or simplified dimensions of culture are implemented concurrently (Artiles, 2000). This state of affairs complicates our understanding of the effectiveness or impact of reforms because of the lack of specificity about the definition of culture and the fact that these initiatives rest upon partial understandings of culture, thus excluding important dimensions of this complex notion.

School personnel need to devote time and energy to discuss and articulate explicitly the vision of culture that underlies their innovation efforts, whether they are linked to curriculum, assessment, instruction, or professional development. We argue a sociocultural view of culture is a viable alternative because of its explicit attention to the link between human development and culture (Scribner, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). We articulate in this section several basic notions about culture and discuss their implications for school change efforts that target culturally diverse students.

Culture is a multidimensional concept that is intertwined with development (Cole, 1996). Two important dimensions of culture are location and cohesion; each dimension embodies various facets. In terms of location, culture has been assumed to reside either inside or outside the mind of the individual. In turn, the cohesion of culture reminds us that both uniformity and diversity co-exist in every culture. On the one hand, culture includes a set of features and elements that are unique to a particular group. Such homogeneity fosters the consolidation of group identity. On the other hand, there is within-group diversity in all cultures. In this section we describe these two dimensions and argue the notion of culture should be conceptualized in terms of "tensions" between the facets contained in each dimension.

Culture is a multidimensional concept that is intertwined with development.

The location of culture. A basic sociocultural tenet is that human development is mediated. Mediational processes are eminently cultural; people use artifacts such as ideas, beliefs, values,

and material objects to make sense of events and coordinate their actions with others to achieve goals in daily life. People acquire this cultural "tool kit" (beliefs, values, ways of knowing) in the contexts of their own communities; that is they are apprenticed to the cultural history of their group. This view locates culture inside the mind of individuals. This is a popular view in special education as reflected in the scholarship on the cognitive, socio-emotional, and linguistic profiles and patterning of ethnic, gender, or linguistic groups.

But there is a second perspective on culture. This perspective assumes that although people enter social situations with an acquired cultural tool kit, they use it in idiosyncratic ways as they negotiate the demands, expectations, resources, and constraints afforded by the very context in which the interaction is unfolding. Thus, this view of culture foregrounds artifact use and the contexts of interactions. From this perspective, culture is located outside the psyche of people; it is found in the interactions and negotiation processes that are situated in institutions and settings where people gather over time to achieve common purposes. In this vein, Cole (1996) concluded:

> *The "internal" and "external" approaches to culture, applied to how to locate structures in the cultural medium, veer in predictably different directions. As external sources of coordination one can point to the many material manifestations of human action, the intricate "webs of significance" in its outer aspect. These are clearly visible as embodied symbols, routines, and rituals for coordinating artifacts. The opposite, internal line of explanation posits internal psychological structures or cultural knowledge as the sources of inter-subjectivity and coordinated action and seeks to understand the processes of interpretation* (p. 124).

Note that the external view of culture can be applied to *any interacting group* in which a culture is formed—i.e., it is not restricted to ethnic, gender, or linguistic groups. This view of culture is often used in the sociology and anthropology of education scholarship to understand how rules, rituals, roles, expectations, and demands of institutional contexts shape the construction of cultural processes and outcomes in places such as classrooms, assessment contexts, IEP meetings, parent-teacher conferences, peer interactions, and the like (e.g., Mehan, Hertwerk, & Meihls, 1986; Varenne & McDermott,

1999). Special education efforts to address the needs of culturally diverse students seldom draw from this view of culture.

The cohesion of culture. A common assumption about culture is that it embodies homogeneity; that is, we often assume all members of a cultural group have distinctive ways of making sense and interpreting the world and achieving goals. Homogeneity is certainly important for it honors the cultural histories of groups; it affords people a sense of identity and belonging. This is indeed the favored perspective in special education scholarship. Prescriptions about cognitive and learning styles are implicitly based on this view of culture.

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...[W]e often assume all members of a cultural group have distinctive ways of making sense and interpreting the world and achieving goals.

However, we should also acknowledge there is within-group diversity in any cultural group. Indeed, cultural histories have a differential impact on the lives of group members. But how is within-group diversity created? A sketch of such process would be outlined as follows: As individuals compose their biographies, they capitalize on the cultural histories of their communities. But individuals are not mere reproducers of culture, they possess agency. The interaction between the reproductive power of culture and a person's agency takes place in the moment-to-moment history of events. Specifically, in any given situation, a person reproduces and changes his or her cultural history while coping with the immediate context's demands, expectations, and constraints. Specifically, individuals contribute to both the *perpetuation* of their cultural history as they rely on it and its *transformation* as they infuse changes and innovations to their cultural history in order to achieve context-specific goals and bring closure to the situation at hand. Let us consider a hypothetical situation that illustrates this idea.

Two boys who recently migrated from the same rural town in Mexico bring a particular cultural history that mediates their worldview and performance. They come from poor families and attended a highly centralized educational system in rural Mexico. In such contexts, they might have been socialized to never question adults or the decisions of educational authorities. As they interact in the U.S. with second-generation Mexican Americans and other ethnic minority groups, they get immersed in cultural histories of resistance to the Anglo Saxon culture of school; these cultural histories are not necessarily congruent with the boys' own worldview. Let us further assume these boys are attending the same middle school classroom and they are assigned to the same science group to work on a project. It happens that the teacher scolds them for not making eye contact when he is reprimanding them for using Spanish in the small group discussion; as the moment-to-moment history of this event unfolds, both boys use their agency to cope with the situation: For one boy, his cultural value of respect for adults prevails, thus, he complies with the teacher's demand and discontinues the use of Spanish in class. In contrast, the second boy's life history has been more permeable to his peers' resistance stance; hence he opts to verbally challenge the teacher and continues to use Spanish. As expected, each boy will face different consequences.

In this example, both boys are engaged in the transformation of their cultural histories. Ironically, although the first boy relied on and thus, contributed to the perpetuation of an aspect of his community's cultural history (specifically, the belief that adults' authority is not questioned), he began to change the perception and value of his native language; the result is a new stance toward English and Spanish, and ultimately, a new outlook on his own cultural history as it relates to language. In the case of the second boy, he adopted the resistance stance he had been exposed to through contacts with other minority students in the school. Thus, he began to change his own cultural history by challenging the authority of an adult, in this case, a teacher. The ultimate consequence in both cases is that the cultural history that these students brought from Mexico was reproduced *and* transformed, though in distinct directions and with disparate purposes and consequences. In summary, within-group diversity emerges from the interactions between individuals' cultural histories and life history; such interactions unfold in the moment-to-moment history of events

as people cope with the demands, resources, and constraints of immediate contexts.

The preceding example is also useful in illustrating an additional consideration to understand the notion of culture, namely the role of power. Erickson (1997) describes this aspect as follows:

> *In societies structured by inequality, not all cultural variants are equally valued. Prestige accrues to some sets of knowledge and taste, and stigma to others. What is valued by the general society serves particular sub-groups and individuals as "cultural capital" … From this point of view cultural diversity within a society is seen as an exact reproduction of the distribution of power within the society* (p. 357).

In the case of the boys described in the example, it is clear the status of the Spanish language and of the culture of its speakers are stigmatized and devalued. This experience will certainly send a clear message to these students regarding the cultural capital needed to function and the sanctioned ways of belonging in this classroom and, ultimately in society.

To conclude, location and cohesion are important dimensions of culture. Each of these dimensions contains various facets: culture is located inside and outside of people's minds and culture is uniform and diverse. Power issues are at the heart of considerations about culture. What are the implications of these ideas for designing educational services for culturally diverse students? Following we discuss briefly two major implications.

Implications of a Broader View of Culture

Beyond dichotomies: Honor the multiple locations of culture. To embed cultural considerations into educational programs and practice, we must first transcend the inside/outside dichotomy of culture. Clearly, both locations play a central role in our understanding of culture and thus, we should rely on a definition that identifies the ongoing tension between both locations. For example, Hutchins's view of culture defines it as "an adaptive process that accumulates the partial solutions to frequently encountered problems…culture is a human cognitive process that takes place both inside and outside the minds of people. It is the process in which our everyday cultural practices are enacted" (as cited in Cole, 1996, p. 129).

The internal view of culture has been traditionally applied almost exclusively to minority students; indeed, we often assume culture belongs to minorities only and thus, we proceed to list the characteristic traits of such groups in terms of beliefs, values, dispositions, and the like. The external location of culture forces us to dispel such myth and to recognize that culture permeates all spheres of life, independent of a person's ethnicity, race, gender, language background, or social class. By embracing a view of culture that acknowledges multiple locations, we are compelled to recognize both what any individual brings to a situation through his or her cultural history and the culture that is constructed as this person interacts with others over time.

Focus on history: Trace the dynamics in the uniformity and diversity of culture. The discussion about the cohesion of culture suggests culture is both constantly reproducing and changing itself. On the one hand, people make concerted efforts to preserve a degree of homogeneity that guarantees the perpetuation of cultural history and hence, group survival. At the same time, within-group diversity is being generated through the agency of group members. The result is that tensions are always present between uniformity and diversity *at the group and individual levels.*[1]

An implication for educators is the need to be aware of what is distinctive about a given group and where group diversity is observed. We cannot afford to focus exclusively on group traits or cultural history for it is impossible to learn all the histories of multiple groups represented in a school population, particularly in large multicultural urban schools. Moreover, an exclusive focus on cultural history tends to perpetuate stereotypes about groups. Instead, educational change initiatives that involve diverse students ought to document group characteristics but also focus on the within-group diversity that is found in the life

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1 It is seldom recognized that the tension between uniformity and diversity of culture is observed *within groups* as variations emerge between group members; but such tension is also observed *within the individual* as he or she struggles to appropriate the group's cultural history while he or she crafts a unique biography that is never a mere replica of such cultural history.

histories of group members, their families, and communities. For instance, teachers can use an enthnographic perspective to understand Latino students' home and community contexts and identify the funds of knowledge these students' families use to survive, attain goals, and solve problems. In turn, teachers can use the diversity of funds of knowledge within the Latino community to enrich the curriculum and make instruction more culturally relevant. Researchers have reported this practice has a positive impact on student academic performance (Moll, 1997; Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

In addition, reform strategies are implemented in contexts where there are unique cultures or webs of significance at work (e.g., classrooms, committees, faculty lounges, administrative departments). The vision of a target reform may be interpreted differently within each web or culture. It is important to document the implementation of reform efforts in all contexts and monitor whether the change was enacted as originally designed. It is necessary to find out how the envisioned change was interpreted and handled in contexts in which disparate cultures (knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, customs) mediate people's everyday lives.

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It is important to document the implementation of reform efforts in all contexts and monitor whether the change was enacted as originally designed.

Let us assume, for example, that a school district institutes a new program to better serve the needs of English learners. Let us also presume that school personnel deliberately align the premises and design of the reform with the institutional assumptions about second language learning, bilingualism, and biculturalism in a diverse society. However, the new program will be ultimately implemented in various schools and classrooms. Even as all teachers and personnel involved do their best to implement the instructional program as originally planned, the reform implementation is mediated by the cultural lenses of the various participants. For instance, teachers' beliefs about particular students and their cultures will cause the program to take on different characteristics in the unique cultural dynamics of classrooms. School leaders should document not

only whether the major features of the programs were implemented, but should also select a random sample of classrooms to assess how the program was interpreted in each classroom. For this purpose, multiple procedures to collect information could be used, including interviews with teachers, students, and parents, instructional aids, teacher journals, participant observation, and whatever other means is feasible given the school resources.

At the heart of solving the problems related to disproportionate representation of racially and ethnically diverse students in special education is providing equity in access to effective education. Thus, special education needs to work seamlessly with general education to ensure a systemic approach to teaching and learning. For the administrator of special education programs, there are two levels at which the seams must be mended. One is the level of resource allocation and use; the other is at the level of promoting whole-school reform.

Creating Seamless Programs

Federal education policies, such as Title I, increasingly promote flexibility in how resources are used and how programs are configured. In fact, increasing flexibility in resource use as well as program design is the third prong of standards-based reform. Special education policy is also shifting toward measuring program success by how well students achieve specific outcomes and less on the ways in which resources are used. McLaughlin and Verstegen (1998), in a study of eight states and 11 school districts, examined how program administrators in Title I, special, and bilingual education were interpreting new demands for more flexible programs. The authors noted that one of the barriers to promoting seamless service delivery is administrative self-interest and fear that any sort of nontargeted resource allocation would result in loss of resources. However, a more significant barrier is the belief system of teachers and some administrators that certain children *belong* in specific programs (e.g., special education), classes, or curricula. In fact, efforts to promote more schoolwide approaches to providing support to low performing students were often thwarted by an institutional culture that promoted sorting and differentiating staff and students.

When excessive numbers of any group of students are represented in certain programs, school personnel and students make interpretations about a group's academic and/or social capacities (Patton & Townsend, 1999). These interpretations foster a culture of acceptance or inevitability that believes if not anticipates academic or behavioral difficulties on the part of certain students. This is why it is critical that school reform efforts address internal and external views of culture so that not only the beliefs and practices of minority students are examined but also the cultural understandings that educators and institutional regulations use to address the educational needs of diverse students.

Among the strategies that schools must adopt are those that promote both instructional collaboration and consolidated school improvement planning. School improvement goals and measurable indicators need to reflect the needs of each student, including individual IEP goals. The entire school staff must participate in creating a "schoolwide IEP" that addresses the full-range of supports and services that will be available and who will provide which services. Among the school-based approaches to outcome-driven flexibility identified by McLaughlin and Verstegen were jointly funded staff, whole school resource centers, and co-teaching models.

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To recognize the tension between the internal and external locations and the uniformity and diversity of culture implies that school reform efforts must be designed, implemented, and evaluated from the perspective of the whole school. A piecemeal approach to school change in which new demands, roles, models, and packages are added on without a comprehensive examination of the school's system of cultural practices is doomed to fail. Attention to the multiple locations of culture and the uniformity and diversity of culture requires the school's division of labor, rules, use of space and time, ownership of the decision-making process, and goals of innovations be

redefined. In this vein, the emerging evidence on ethnographic studies of multicultural education classrooms (Mehan, Okamoto, Lintz, & Wills, 1995), communities of practice (Henry et al., 1999; Hutchinson & Martin, 1999; Palincsar, Magnusson, Morano, Ford, & Brown, 1998; Perry, Walton, & Calder, 1999), and communities of learners (Gutierrez & Stone, 1997) is potentially useful.

For instance, reforms based on a whole-school model require the creation of a culture that provides opportunities for educators to (1) discuss and reach consensus on the functions and means of education in a diverse society; (2) redefine the nature of teaching so that the traditionally isolated and individualistic nature of teachers' work is transformed; (3) envision teachers as learners with rich life histories and distinctive cultural perspectives that mediate their construction of knowledge and learning; (4) change the conception of knowledge and the knowledge base for teaching from a static body of information to a socially constructed entity that is situated in sociohistorical contexts; (5) conceive learning as socially based and evidenced in the transformation of participation as students and teachers use ideas, information, and skills in qualitatively different ways; (6) rethink the notion of leadership and the roles administrators need to play in this new approach; (7) make professional development a habit in the life of school personnel and ground it on a dialogic, inquiry-based model; (8) articulate, deliberate, and agree about explicit and challenging expectations for all students; (9) challenge policies and practices that result in disproportionate representation in special or gifted education programs or differentially impact disparate *groups* of students; and (10) create a community of educators with a strong collective sense of accountability for ensuring the success of each student.

Substantial changes are called for if educators are to successfully avoid past patterns of denial of educational opportunity to minority children, particularly those in need of special programs and services. At the heart of these changes must be a well-qualified community of educators and school leaders willing to adopt successful reform strategies to significantly alter the culture of entire schools.

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Can "All" Really Mean Students With Disabilities Who Have Limited English Proficiency?

Rethinking Culture in School Reform

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- IEP/LEP students may be a forgotten group when it comes to inclusion in state and district assessments.

- Research on the effects of accommodations reflects the complexity of decisionmaking—individual factors must be considered in selecting accommodations.

- Alternate assessment for students with disabilities are underway in all states, but only two states have LEP alternate assessments, and we have no idea how IEP/LEP students are being included in alternate assessments.

- Most states do not disaggregate the state assessment data of IEP/LEP students, and in several states it may not even be possible to do so.

Students with disabilities have always been a diverse group of youngsters. Their diversity is increasing even more as students who are limited English proficient (LEP) are identified as having disabilities. It is this group that we address here, in the context of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 97) requirements that all students with disabilities are to be included in state and district assessments.

The reality of students with disabilities participating in regular state and district assessments is several years behind us now (Thurlow & Thompson, 1999). IDEA requirements for the development and implementation of alternate assessments for those students who cannot participate in state and district assessments also have now passed, although states seem still to be finalizing their alternate assessments (Thompson & Thurlow, 2001).

Requirements for the participation of students with disabilities in state and district assessment programs is also part of the Title I provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Title I supports compensatory programs for schools with significant portions of their students from low-income families. To receive Title I funds, which comprise a significant amount of money for states and

schools, states must set content and performance standards, and then ensure that all students are included in the measurement of progress toward these standards. To evaluate the progress made by schools, states must report disaggregate and report the performance of students with disabilities and compare it to the performance of students without disabilities. Similarly, states must disaggregate the performance of different ethnic groups and of LEP students. Only those LEP students who have been in U.S. schools less than one year are exempt from inclusion in these requirements.

One of the critical reasons for requiring public reporting on the performance of disaggregated groups is to ensure that these groups are not lost or forgotten as the country moves forward in its agenda of educational reform (Elmore & Rothman, 1999). With wide-ranging concerns about the low performance of all students on national and state assessments, it is easy to focus on more visible and outspoken students.

The purpose of this article is to address a growing group of students who could be forgotten in all current education reform discussions—students with disabilities who also have limited English proficiency. We first identify who these students are, how

many of them there are, and why it is important for them to participate. Then, we look at what we know about how these students should be included in assessment systems—both through accommodated testing and through the provision of alternate assessments. Finally, we explore what we can learn about the participation of these students in statewide assessments and about their performance on those assessments. We conclude by highlighting several next steps toward ensuring that these students are not lost or forgotten, and that indeed, by including them in the "all" students rhetoric, they reap all the benefits of education reform that they are due.

A Forgotten Group of Students — IEP/LEP Students

None of the rhetoric of reform has recognized the group of students with disabilities who are also students with limited English proficiency (LEP). We refer to these students here as IEP/LEP students, as a shorthand reference for a very diverse group of students.

How many IEP/LEP students are there? While this question sounds simple, we really do not have good estimates of the number of IEP/LEP students. We can generate estimates, however, by looking at the populations of students with disabilities and the populations of LEP students. Across the U.S. approximately 11% of school age students are served in special education programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Barring unusual circumstances (e.g., significant incidence of brain damage from war injuries), it is reasonable to expect that the incidence of disabilities might be about the same for LEP students as for other students, unless cultural values or other factors limit participation in special education programs to those with the more significant disabilities. The Web site of the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE: www.ncbe.gwu.edu) estimates that approximately 3.4 million students (or 7.6% of total public school enrollment) were LEP students in those states receiving Title VII funds in the 1997-98 school year, the most recent data available.

Math calculations produce a couple different ballpark figures of the number of IEP/LEP students. Starting with the number of LEP students, and using a 10% disability rate, we obtain an estimate of

340,000 IEP/LEP students. If we start from the number of IEP students (about 6 million) and estimate using the 7.6% LEP students, we obtain an estimate of 456,000 IEP/LEP students. Given that both of these calculations are based on data several years old, and given recent increases noted by the 2000 Census, it is not unreasonable to estimate that approximately ½ million students are IEP/LEP students. This number is sure to increase in the future.

Why should IEP/LEP students be included in state and district assessments? For some time now there has been a strong and consistent message about the importance of being included in education in a way that ensures that the system itself is held accountable for the learning of all students. Of the many specific benefits of including various groups of previously excluded students in standards-based assessments (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke 1998; Thurlow & Liu, 2000), perhaps the two most important for IEP/LEP students are: (1) standards-based reforms and special interventions will be designed with these students in mind, and (2) expectations for these students will be increased. When assessment data do not include all students, the results do not reflect the performance of those students excluded. Unless their data are included in some way, it is unlikely that their needs will be recognized and plans made to address them. Further, there is a history of low expectations and protectiveness toward both students with disabilities and LEP students, possibly resulting in a double whammy for IEP/LEP students.

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...[T]here has been a strong and consistent message about the importance of being included in education in a way that ensures that the system itself is held accountable for the learning of all students.

It is important to recognize that it is not reasonable to simply force IEP/LEP students to take state and district tests in the same way as all other students. Providing students with accommodations that give them access to the tests and that allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills rather than their disabilities or lack of English proficiency is an important piece of assessing IEP/LEP students.

Another important element is the provision of alternate assessments for a small number of IEP/LEP students.

Assessment Accommodations for IEP/LEP Students

Researchers have found that the availability of test accommodations is one of the keys to ensuring greater large-scale test participation by special education and LEP students (Mazzeo, Carlson, Voekl, & Lutkus, 2000). When appropriate accommodations are available to students with special needs, assessment decisionmakers are more likely to make an informed decision about how an IEP, LEP, or IEP/LEP student should participate in state and district assessments. In addition, the scores of the students will better reflect what they are capable of doing rather than only showing what their limitations are.

> When appropriate accommodations are available to students with special needs, assessment decision makers are more likely to make an informed decision about how an IEP, LEP, or IEP/LEP student should participate in state and district assessments.

One of the main difficulties in providing accommodations for IEP/LEP students is that no accommodations have been specifically designed for them. There are accommodations that specifically address a student's disability and there are others that specifically address a student's limited English skills. Educators responsible for making accommodation decisions for IEP/LEP students must pick from both lists. In the past, LEP students were frequently offered accommodations that were originally designed for students with disabilities. Examples include large print test booklets, extra breaks between segments of the test, or having someone read portions of a test to them. Some of these accommodations may be helpful to some LEP students, but often the accommodations that best reduce the language load of the test are not available. Translations, interpretations, or use of a bilingual dictionary are considered by many states to change the assessed standard and therefore are not allowed (Rivera, Stansfield, Scialdone, & Sharkey, 2000).

When states develop policies on allowed accommodations, policymakers sometimes ask for research studies showing which ones are the most beneficial for LEP students. Unfortunately, there have been few studies to which they could turn. Several recent studies that have examined the use of accommodations provide insight into the complexity of that decision-making process. These studies demonstrate that the same accommodation cannot be given to every LEP student with the same benefit. Individual factors within the student's background and experience need to be considered. A brief summary of some of these studies is provided here:

Bilingual reading test forms. This study examined the feasibility of offering LEP students a state reading test with the passages in English but the test questions and answers in both the native language and English (Anderson, Liu, Swierzbin, Thurlow, & Bielinski, 2000). While examinees still had to read the reading passage in English, being able to read the questions and answer choices in their native language potentially would provide emotional benefits that could result in increased performance.

Findings from the study indicated that participants were most likely to choose the written version of the items in one language—usually English—and stay with it. If they used the native language version, it was used like a dictionary—to check unfamiliar vocabulary. For some students, this process of vocabulary checking was not helpful because it did not provide the student with the meaning of the unfamiliar word. Even though all participants had access to an audiotape of the questions and answer choices, the majority did not choose to use them. For those students who reported using the bilingual accommodation (either written or aural), there was not a significant boost in their scores as a group. Those students most proficient in English did not use the bilingual accommodation and those least proficient

> ...[B]eing able to read the questions and answer choices in their native language potentially would provide emotional benefits that could result in increased performance.

in English, while more likely to use the accommodation, were the least likely to have the skills to benefit from it. Students with moderate proficiency in English and some reading ability in their native language might be most likely to benefit from a bilingual test booklet.

Simplified English dictionaries. This study examined the feasibility of using a monolingual simplified English dictionary for LEP students taking a reading test (Albus, Bielinski, Thurlow, & Liu, 2001). Most of the participants spoke Hmong at home but could not read Hmong. Each student took some reading test passages with the accommodation and others without it. Findings indicated student performance overall was similar under both standard and accommodated conditions. For students who reported using the dictionary when it was allowed, those with intermediate level English reading skills had a statistically significant test score gain due to the presence of the dictionary, whereas those with poor English-reading proficiency did not benefit. Those students with higher English reading levels tended not to use the accommodation. While all students showed evidence of having basic dictionary skills, some students were not able to choose the correct meaning from a list of possibilities.

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For students who reported using the dictionary when it was allowed, those with intermediate level English reading skills had a statistically significant test score gain due to the presence of the dictionary, whereas those with poor English-reading proficiency did not benefit.

Relationship of language difficulty in items and accommodation impact. This study looked at whether there are linguistic features in math test items that account for the differing performance levels of native English speakers and LEP students (Lord, Abedi, & Poosuthasee, 2000). They also examined the ways in which accommodations affected student performance on items with varying linguistic complexity. Unfortunately, because testing materials were originally constructed with simplified

language, there was not enough variability to examine differences. LEP student achievement was related to item length and type—longer items were more difficult, as were open-ended items requiring students to construct responses. Students receiving accommodations tended to score lower than those without accommodations; this is logical since those students who receive accommodations are those with less English proficiency.

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Effects of accommodations use on the scores of LEP students. A study by Hafner (2000) looked at whether different student groups benefited from math test accommodations, specifically (1) extra time, and (2) extra time with extended test directions. Findings showed that use of the accommodation was related to higher scores in non-LEP students, but not for LEP students. It appeared that LEP students often did not have enough English proficiency, particularly knowledge of language specific to math, to understand the math items. Hafner recommended that if extra time is allowed as an accommodation, it be allowed for all students who need it regardless of whether they have special needs.

Effects of linguistic simplification on science test items. Rivera and Stansfield (2001) investigated whether simplified language in test items unfairly benefited LEP students on a state science test. With simplified language field test items in the regular state test, all students taking the test received these field test items in one form or another. When the results were compared, not enough LEP students had been tested to reach conclusions about the impact of the simplified versions. However, there were enough native English speakers tested to conclude that the simplified version of the items did not improve the scores of native speakers and, therefore, would not give LEP students who use this accommodation on a test an unfair advantage over them.

Alternate Assessments for IEP/LEP Students

To understand what alternate assessments might be like for IEP/LEP students, it helps to first look at alternate assessments designed for IEP students, and then at those designed for LEP students. We do not know of any state that has developed an alternate assessment specifically for IEP/LEP students. This does not imply that it is necessary to do so, but simply that it has not been done.

Alternate assessments for IEP students. With all states required to develop and implement alternate assessments by July, 2000, we now know more about what these assessments are like across the U.S. (Klienert & Kearns, 2001; Thompson, Quenemoen, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 2001; Thompson & Thurlow, 2001). For example, the majority of states are assessing the same standards with their alternate assessments as they assess with their general assessments. They do this by expanding the state standards or by linking a set of functional skills to the state standards. In some cases they assess a set of functional skills in addition to the state standards. Most states collect some type of body of evidence for their alternate assessment, and then have teachers of the students or other teachers score the bodies of evidence (although some states rely on test contractors or state agency personnel). In some cases, states have decided to use a checklist or rating scale approach, and in a couple states, the IEP is used as the basis for determining the progress of alternate assessment students toward standards.

States also vary in terms of the types of scores that students in alternate assessments might earn (Thompson & Thurlow, 2001). Most states measure the level of the student's skills, but about 20 states add in measures of the system (e.g., staff support, instructional settings). About one-third of the states use the same proficiency level names as they do for their general assessment, whereas another third have different names for their alternate assessment proficiency levels.

Alternate assessments for LEP students. A few states recently have decided that some type of alternate assessment is needed specifically for those LEP students who are not yet able to participate in general state assessments. While a number of states have tests meant to be used with their LEP students, many of these are actually measures of language proficiency (often to define eligibility) rather than alternates to a standards-based general assessment.

Based on the experiences of states in developing alternate assessments for students with disabilities, there are five steps involved in development that would also apply to assessments for LEP students (Ysseldyke, Olsen, & Thurlow, 1997; Thompson et al., 2001): (1) define who qualifies; (2) identify the standards to be assessed; (3) develop participation guidelines; (4) determine measurement procedures; and (5) decide how to aggregate and report data. We know of two states that have standards-based alternate assessments for their LEP students: Arkansas and Delaware. Both of these states are using a portfolio or body of evidence approach for their LEP alternates.

The Arkansas Alternate Portfolio Assessment System for Students with Limited English Proficiency is available for a maximum of three chronological years before the students must enter the general state assessment. It is designed to assess LEP students on the same challenging standards as identified for other students (mathematics and language arts). Scores on the LEP portfolio are based on progress toward the grade-level standards and benchmarks.

In Delaware, the alternate assessment for LEP students is called PALS—**P**ortfolio **A**ssessment for **L**imited English Proficient **S**tudents. The assessment is a standards-based language arts assessment that builds off of four Delaware standards (communication—oral and written, comprehension, and connections—content and culture). Students' work samples are collected for portfolio documentation. Teachers are provided with the functions that correspond to each standard, as well as examples of types of work samples that the students might produce as evidence of meeting standards. Rubrics are provided for determining student proficiency levels, which include B1 to B4, indicating that the student has not attained proficiency on the standard, and B5, indicating that the student has attained proficiency.

Participation and Performance of IEP/LEP Students in State Assessments

Thompson and Thurlow (2001) surveyed state directors of special education to determine the information that they had available to them on IEP/LEP students in assessments (see Table 1). Nearly two-thirds of the state directors indicated that their states either did not disaggregate data for IEP/LEP students, or they did not know whether the state could disaggregate those data.

When we turn to state Web sites to see what is actually available, we find that there is very little data (Thurlow, Liu, Anderson, & Albus, 2001). Eight states provide some type of data on this group of students (California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Texas). New York only gives IEP/LEP data at the district level. Florida gives IEP/LEP state enrollment, but no test data. New Jersey gives IEP/LEP test participation but no performance. Michigan's data include a category of reporting for answers given in another language—a hint of LEP students.

Only four states, California, Colorado, Delaware, and Texas, have some data on both the participation and performance of IEP/LEP students (Thurlow, et al., 2001). In California, Colorado, and Texas, the performance of IEP/LEP students is given for those who are Spanish speakers taking an alternate version of the state assessment in Spanish. There are no IEP/LEP data for those students taking the state test in English, regardless of whether they are native speakers of Spanish or of some other language. Delaware has such small numbers of IEP/LEP students participating in the state test (1-10 per grade) that scores are not reported for this group on any test at any grade level.

A special study in Minnesota provides some of the only longitudinal data on both students with disabilities, by disability category, and LEP students. Still, it does not provide IEP/LEP data, but gives a sense of what it might be like. Table 2 includes participation data for 1998-2000. As is evident, the participation rates of both students with disabilities and LEP students are quite high. It might be reasonable to assume that the participation rates of IEP/LEP students also would be high.

Minnesota also has data on performance. Table 3 shows the performance for both IEP and LEP students is low, regardless of the test. On the Basic Standards Test (BST), a minimum competency

Table 1: States that Disaggregate Assessment Data for IEP/LEP

Participation Data Only	Performance Data Only	Participation & Performance Data	No Disaggregation		Unknown*
Arizona	Montana	California	Alaska	Missouri	Hawaii
Connecticut	New Hampshire	Colorado	Alabama	North Carolina	Mississippi
Georgia	Utah	Florida	Arkansas	New Mexico	North Dakota
Nevada	Virginia	Kentucky	Delaware	Nevada	Ohio
		Massachusetts	Iowa	New York	Rhode Island
		Maine	Idaho	Oklahoma	Washington
		New Jersey	Illinois	Oregon	
		Tennessee	Indiana	Pennsylvania	
		Texas	Kansas	South Carolina	
		Vermont	Louisiana	South Dakota	
			Maryland	Wisconsin	
			Michigan	West Virginia	
			Minnesota	Wyoming	
4 states (8%)	4 states (8%)	10 states (20%)	26 states (52%)		6 states (12%)

Note: This table is reprinted with permission from Thompson and Thurlow (2001), *2001 State Special Education Outcomes: A Report on State Activities at the Beginning of a New Decade.*

*No information or no response.

Table 2: IEP and LEP Student Participation in Minnesota's State Assessments

| | Reading | | | Mathematics | | |
	1998	1999	2000*	1998	1999	2000*
MCAs (Gr 3)						
IEP	84	83	87*	85	85	88*
LEP	93	89	93*	92	89	93*
All	95	95	97*	95	95	96*
MCAs (Gr 5)						
IEP	91	90	89*	85	84	89*
LEP	91	90	94*	91	89	93*
All	95	96	97*	95	95	96*
BSTs (Gr 8)						
IEP	89	90	92*	89	90	92*
LEP	88	93	97*	89	93	97*
All	98	97	98*	98	97	98*

Note: Entries are percentages of IEP or LEP students who were tested on the MCAs (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments) and BSTs (Basic Standards Tests). Data are from the following sources: Davison, Davenport, Kwak, Peterson, Choi, Hjelseth, Schleisman, & Seo, (2000); Liu, Anderson, & Thurlow, (2000); Liu & Thurlow, (2000); Liu & Thurlow, (1999); Thompson, Thurlow, & Spiccuza, (2000); Thompson, Thurlow, Spicuzza, & Parson, (1999); Thurlow, Albus, Spicuzza, & Thompson, (1998); Walz, Thompson, Thurlow, & Spicuzza, (2000).

* According to the Minnesota Office of Educational Accountability, 2000 data include only those students who were in the district for a year or longer at the time of testing.

Table 3: LEP and IEP Student Performance on State Tests

| | Reading | | | Mathematics | | |
	1998	1999	2000*	1998	1999	2000*
MCAs (Gr 3)						
IEP	12	19	18*	10	16	21*
LEP	4	8	6*	6	10	13*
All	36	40	48*	35	42	49*
MCAs (Gr 5)						
IEP	12	15	23*	10	14	20*
LEP	5	6	8*	5	5	10*
All	38	44	56*	31	37	47*
BSTs (Gr 8)						
IEP	27	33	40*	29	27	30*
LEP	16	22	32*	23	24	32*
All	68	74	81*	71	70	73*

Note: Entries are percentages of students who met the standards levels III and IV on the MCAs (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments) or the passing level on the BSTs (Basic Standards Tests). Data are from the following sources: Davison, Davenport, Kwak, Peterson, Choi, Hjelseth, Schleisman, & Seo, (2000); Liu, Anderson, & Thurlow, (2000); Liu, & Thurlow, (2000); Liu & Thurlow, (1999); Thompson, Thurlow, & Spicuzza, (2000); Thompson, Thurlow, Spicuzza, & Parson, (1999); Thurlow, Albus, Spicuzza, & Thompson, (1998); Walz, Thompson, Thurlow, & Spicuzza, (2000).

* According to the Minnesota Office of Educational Accountability, 2000 data. All include only those students who were in the district for a year or longer at the time of testing. It is unclear whether the data include IEP students who had IEP team determined modified passing rates.

graduation test, there is about a 40% difference between the scores of the total student group and the scores of IEP students. There is a 40% to 50% difference between the scores of the total student group and LEP students. Scores for grades 3 and 5 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments standards-based accountability measures show a similar pattern. While there is less of a gap in students achieving success (defined as scoring in the top two proficiency levels—"proficient" and "advanced") at grades 3 and 5, the gap still is approximately 20% to 30% between all students and IEP students. It is roughly 30% to 40% between all students and LEP students.

Minnesota's data also have been analyzed by disability category (Thompson, Thurlow, Spicuzza, & Parson, 1999; Thurlow, Albus, Spicuzza, & Thompson, 1998). These data show that students with learning disabilities, other health impairments (which includes students with ADHD), and emotional/behavioral disabilities have lower performance than students in other disability categories. It can be reasoned, then, that LEP students with learning disabilities, other health impairments, and emotional/behavioral disabilities are those who are most in danger of being forgotten in reform efforts unless their needs are brought to the attention of educators and policymakers.

Recommendations for Next Steps

While there are several next steps to pursue, the first is to get a better handle on the data. How many students are really IEP/LEP students? This means looking at students with disabilities and determining whether they also have limited English proficiency. It also means looking at LEP students and determining whether they have a disability. After identifying who these students are, it is important to determine whether they have been included in state and district assessments. Neither having a disability nor being of limited English proficiency is any longer a reason for exclusion from large-scale assessments.

An important part of participating in assessments is having the right decisions being made about *how* these students should participate. A solid process for determining whether IEP/LEP students should be in an alternate assessment rather than the regular assessment (possibly with accommodations) is essential. Further, for those students in the regular assessment, a careful determination will need to be made about accommodations that may be needed. It would be beneficial at both state and local levels to have a combined list of IEP/LEP accommodations rather than separate lists. In addition, it may be useful to have some external measures of the effectiveness of various accommodations as they are provided during instruction for individual students.

Finally, and perhaps most important, is the need to re-examine instruction for students with disabilities who have limited English proficiency. Are they receiving standards-based instruction? Are they learning content at the same time that they are improving their English skills? It is critical to make sure that learning English does not bar the student from success in a standards-based educational system.

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A Framework for Serving English Language Learners With Disabilities

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- English Language Learners experience significant achievement difficulties and are disproportionately represented in special education.

- Policies and procedures for assuring appropriate services for English Language Learners with disabilities must include prevention and early intervention strategies.

- Special education policies and procedures must also be adapted to address students' linguistic and cultural characteristics.

- Special education leaders must work with general educators in the design and implementation of an appropriate special education service delivery system for English Language Learners.

In the last ten years, all regions of the country have experienced large increases in the number of ethnic minorities and linguistically diverse persons. African Americans and Hispanics, in aggregate, represent one of every four persons in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). These demographic changes are reflected dramatically in schools; for example, all of the major urban cities now have "majority minority" enrollments (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000). Many of these students come from homes where languages other than English are spoken.

English Language Learners (ELLs) have such limited English skills that they cannot profit from general education instruction without support (Kushner & Ortiz, 2000). They are typically served in bilingual education or in English as a second language (ESL) programs. Because education professionals are generally unprepared to serve them, ELLs experience limited academic success and are disproportionately represented in special education programs (Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Drescher, 1994). For example, 20% of the limited English proficient fourth graders who participated in the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress had disabilities (Mazzeo, Carlson, Voekl, & Lutkus, 2000).

To address the issues of academic underachievement and disproportionate representation, special education leaders must forge a close alliance with general education. The participation of general educators in special education processes was significantly enhanced by the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997). General education teachers typically initiate referrals; multidisciplinary teams, which are typically chaired by school principles and which include general education teachers, decide whether students qualify for special education services. Yet, general education administrators and teachers oftentimes have limited training related to special education and/or the education of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Special education leaders must thus be alert to demographic changes and provide leadership in structuring a general and special education system responsive to the needs of these students.

This paper presents a framework (see Figure 1) to guide special education services for English Language Learners. Policies and procedures that can minimize disproportionate representation are suggested, as are recommendations for appropriate referral, assessment, and instructional practices.

Figure 1: A Framework for Serving English Language Learners With Disabilities

PREVENTION

- Establish positive school climates

- Provide early intervention
  -Clinical teaching
  -Alternative programs and services

- Provide support systems for teachers
  -Peer or expert consultation
  -Problem solving teams

REFERRAL

- Gather relevant data

- Describe current performance in the native language (L1) and in English as a second language (L2)

- Review recommendations of bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) personnel

- Review outcomes of prevention and early intervention efforts

- Verify student's dominant language

APPRAISAL PERSONNEL

- Use qualified, bilingual evaluators

- If none are available in the district, contract the services of a bilingual professional

- If bilingual professionals are not available, train others to conduct assessments and/or to serve as interpreters:
  -Bilingual education teachers
  -Other bilingual professionals
  -Bilingual professionals in the community
  -Bilingual, nonprofessionals in the district
  -Bilingual, nonprofessionals in the community

- Select the professional who will conduct the assessment

PLAN THE ASSESSMENT

The evaluator should:

- Review existing data

- Determine other data needs

- Select an assessment battery to include:
  -a variety of tools and procedures
  -instruments normed on ELLs
  -instruments appropriate for assessmentof performance in L1 and L2
  -informal assessment strategies for assessing performance in L1 and L2

- Determine appropriate adaptations of standardized assessments and procedures

CONDUCT THE ASSESSMENT AND REPORT RESULTS

- Describe strengths and weaknesses

- Describe progress in bilingual education, ESL, and general education curricula

- Identify modifications of instruction methods, and materials needed for both L1 and L2 instruction

- Describe nature of bilingual evaluations

- Describe all adaptations of instruments and procedures

- Do not report scores if norms not appropriate for ELLs or administrations were nonstandard

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM MEMBERSHIP

In addition to those required by law:

- Representatives with expertise in the education of ELLs

- Representatives of alternative programs and services in which student is served (e.g., ESL, Title I)

- Representatives who can interpret L1 and L2 assessment data

- Interpreters may be needed so parents can participate meaningfully in deliberations

continued—

Figure 1: A Framework for Serving English Language Learners With Disabilities (continued)

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES	DEVELOP THE IEP	SELECT LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE)
• Determine if student qualifies and needs special education services	In addition to other components required by law:	Instruction must address disability-related needs and provide native language and/or ESL instruction, as appropriate.
• Determine present level of performance and needs in L1 and L2	• Goals and objectives to be delivered in the native language and/or using ESL strategies	LRE options should include:
• Determine extent to which the student will participate in bilingual education, ESL, and/or general education curricula	• Instructional level for all goals and objectives	• Bilingual education with special education consultation
• Determine whether student will participate in districtwide or statewide assessments and the language of test-taking	• Persons responsible for L1 and L2 instruction	• General education with ESL instruction and special education consultation
• Provide assurances that problems are not primarily the result of lack of academic support, limited English proficiency, cultural, or other background characteristics	• Language to be used for related services	• Bilingual special education resource
• Develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP)	• Specialized materials, programs, technology, in L1 and L2	• Special education/ESL resource
	• Recommended instructional strategies for L1 and L2 instruction	• Self-contained bilingual special education
	• Modifications for bilingual education, ESL, and/or general education instruction	• Self-contained special education/ESL
	• Procedures to inform parents, in their native language, about their child's progress	

IMPLEMENT THE IEP

ANNUAL REVIEW

• Evaluate progress as a result of L1 and L2 instruction

• Determine need for additional assessment

• Update language dominance and proficiency data annually

• Determine whether student continues to be eligible for special education services

If eligible, revise IEP and address any lack of expected progress and/or results of new evaluations.

If not eligible, return student to special language program.

Prevention of Failure and Early Intervention for Struggling Learners

Preventing academic problems from occurring in the first place, and providing early intervention for students experiencing academic difficulties, is more cost effective than special education if students do not have disabilities (Ortiz, 2000; Fashola & Slavin, 1998).

Prevention

Effective schools for ELLs are characterized by strong leadership by principals; high expectations; acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity; a challenging curriculum; instruction which supports native language and English as a second language (ESL) development; systematic evaluation of student progress; shared decision making; and collaborative school-community relationships (Ortiz, 2000; Ortiz & Wilkinson, 1991; Cummins, 1989). To ensure that educators understand the unique characteristics and needs of these students, professional development programs should develop their expertise in: (1) native and English as a second language acquisition; (2) cultural and economic influences on teaching and learning; (3) native language and English language assessment; (4) effective native language and ESL instruction; and (5) working with parents and families of ELLs.

> ...[P]roviding early intervention for students experiencing academic difficulties is more cost effective than special education if students do not have disabilities.

Early Intervention

Prereferral intervention typically occurs too late to prevent unnecessary special education referrals and placements (Garcia & Ortiz, 1988). By the time teachers request assistance, the student's academic difficulties are so serious that the teacher's interest in problem solving is half-hearted, and with good reason. If students are more than a year below grade level, even the best remedial or special education programs are unlikely to be successful (Slavin &

Madden, 1989). In contrast, early intervention requires that supplementary instructional services be provided early enough, and that they be intense enough, to bring students quickly to a level at which they can succeed in the general education classroom (Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1991).

> ...[E]arly intervention requires that supplementary instructional services be provided early enough, and that they be intense enough, to bring students quickly to a level at which they can succeed in the general education classroom.

Clinical or diagnostic/prescriptive teaching is an excellent example of early intervention for ELLs (Ortiz, 2000; Ortiz & Wilkinson, 1991; Garcia & Ortiz, 1988). Teachers who use this approach analyze student performance as soon as they first notice a problem, identify gaps in skills and knowledge, and develop instruction to eliminate those gaps. They conduct curriculum-based assessments (e.g., using observations, inventories, work samples) and use evaluation data to design instructional interventions (English & Steffy, 2001). Assessment portfolios are maintained, and if a student is ultimately referred, this portfolio accompanies the referral. If clinical teaching does not resolve the problem, general educators should have access to support systems. These might include, for example, peer and expert consultation and general education problem-solving committees such as Teacher Assistance Teams (Chalfant & Pysh, 1981). Alternative programs which offer tutorial or remedial instruction in the context of general education should also be readily available for struggling learners (Ortiz, 1997; Ortiz & Wilkinson, 1991; Garcia & Ortiz, 1988).

Adapting the Special Education Process for English Language Learners

When efforts to resolve achievement difficulties fail, referral to special education is appropriate.

Referral

Referral committees decide whether students receive a comprehensive individual assessment. This decision should be informed by data gathered through the prevention, early intervention, and referral processes (Ortiz, 1997). In addition to reviewing the student's current educational status, referral committees must solicit parents' perceptions of presenting problems. Parents will more likely consent to a comprehensive evaluation if they have concerns similar to those of school personnel or have noted the same problematic behaviors at home.

Assessments must be conducted in the student's dominant language and disabilities must manifest themselves in this language (Ortiz & Garcia, 1990). It is thus important that the referral committee verify the dominant language, that is, the language in which a student demonstrates greater ability or proficiency. Language data should be current, preferably no more than six months old (Ortiz et al., 1985). Bilingual education or ESL program personnel should update these assessments annually; otherwise, the person conducting the eligibility assessments must establish the student's language dominance.

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In addition to reviewing the student's current educational status, referral committees must solicit parents' perceptions of presenting problems.

Norm-referenced instruments yield an incomplete language profile because they typically do not assess spontaneous conversation or cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1989). Academic language proficiency is the more complex, abstract dimension of language and includes literacy-related skills such as predicting or inferring. Formal assessments should thus be supplemented by informal measures of both conversational and academic language skills in different contexts, both at home and at school.

Qualified Assessment Personnel

Assessment personnel must have appropriate licenses or credentials and be qualified to assess ELLs. In addition to the professional development topics identified earlier, they should have expertise in: (1) instruments and procedures for assessing ELLs; (2) alternative assessments and appropriate modifications of standardized tests; (3) using interpreters; (4) interpreting assessment outcomes in light of linguistic, cultural, and other background characteristics; and, (5) effective instructional practices for ELLs with disabilities (Leung, 1996; Ortiz & Garcia, 1995). Moreover, they must examine their own culture, values, and beliefs and how these might introduce bias into the assessment or into their interpretations of student performance (Leung, 1996).

If not available in the district, the services of qualified, bilingual professionals should be contracted (Yates & Ortiz, 1995). Districts should maintain a list of bilingual evaluators in their community; State Departments of Education should maintain a statewide registry. If interpreters are used, they must have native-like proficiency in the target language and training related to: (1) the purpose of special education and of comprehensive individual assessments; (2) maintaining confidentiality; (3) their role and that of the educational evaluator; (4) administering assessments; and (5) accurately reporting student responses. This means that the use of custodians, office assistants, or siblings is unacceptable practice.

If it is not possible to assess students in their native language, the eligibility decision will hinge on ruling out lack of English proficiency as the cause of the problem. In these instances, the assessor must establish a baseline description of the student's English proficiency. ESL instruction must then be provided for a period of time, carefully monitoring progress. Students without disabilities will demonstrate increased proficiency. Students with disabilities will continue to struggle in spite of effective ESL instruction. Relying on this "test-teach-test" approach to determining eligibility creates a dilemma given federal guidelines requiring timely assessments. However, if general education teachers have expertise in English as a second language acquisition and use diagnostic/prescription teaching approaches, they will have documented the instructional strategies they used to address students' language needs and resulting progress. This is exactly the type of information needed to rule out lack of

knowledge of English as the basis of students' learning problems.

Selecting the Assessment Battery

Assessment instruments must have norms appropriate to English Language Learners and be free of racial, linguistic, or cultural bias. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to review the availability of such instruments, the following guidelines are offered for evaluating the performance of ELLs and reporting assessment outcomes:

1. Whenever possible, equivalent instruments in the native language and in English (e.g., the Spanish and English versions of a vocabulary test) should be used to contrast performance across languages on comparable skills.

2. Results of norm-referenced instruments should be compared against outcomes of informal assessments in the native language and in English (e.g., results of formal reading tests compared to results obtained on informal reading assessments).

3. Because of the heavy English language demands of tests of intelligence and cognitive abilities, nonverbal measures should be utilized.

4. Parents should be involved in the assessment process to help validate the assessor's observations of student performance and to affirm whether these behaviors are typical of their child at home and in the community.

5. In reporting assessment results, students should be given credit for correct responses in the native language and in English, in aggregate. For example, a student who knows ten vocabulary words in Spanish and ten different words in English knows 20 vocabulary words. This should not be interpreted to mean that test scores in the native language and in English should be added but, rather, that patterns of strengths and weakness should reflect all that a student knows or can do, regardless of the language in which the skill is demonstrated.

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Assessment instruments must have norms appropriate to English Language Learners and be free of racial, linguistic, or cultural bias.

Adaptations of Assessment Instruments and Procedures

Special education leaders must provide guidance as to acceptable adaptations of standardized instruments and procedures. In the absence of such guidance, there is great potential for inconsistencies in how ELLs are assessed and in who qualifies for services. Adaptations of standardized procedures might include using local norms, testing limits (e.g., removing time limits), or using tests normed outside of the U.S. However, scores on instruments which were not normed for ELLs, or which were obtained through adapted procedures, should not be reported as they are not true reflections of student abilities. It would be inappropriate, for example, to calculate a discrepancy score based on the use of adapted intelligence and achievement measures. Such data can be used for diagnostic (versus eligibility) purposes.

Conducting the Assessment and Analyzing Results

The comprehensive assessment should yield information about students' academic, developmental, or behavioral characteristics and patterns of strengths and weaknesses in the native language and in English (Yates & Ortiz, 1995). Assessors should report results in writing, alerting consumers to the limitations of adapted procedures and thus the need for caution in interpreting assessment data obtained in nonstandard ways. They should share their clinical observations relative to the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the student and how these may have influenced assessment outcomes. Assessors should also offer preliminary recommendations for instruction in the native language and/or in English as a second language and instructional modifications that may be needed to ensure success.

Multidisciplinary Teams

Team Membership

The multidisciplinary team (MDT) must include representatives who understand unique considerations in educating ELLs (Yates & Ortiz, 1998; Yates & Ortiz, 1995). If the student is being served in alternative programs (e.g., ESL or Title I), personnel from these programs should be included on the MDT. An

interpreter will be needed so that limited English proficient parents can participate meaningfully in deliberations and can make an informed decision about giving, or withholding, consent for services. Interpreters must be proficient in the students' dominant language and appropriately trained. Copies of team deliberations and of the IEP (or, at a minimum, accurate summaries) should be provided in the parents' native language. This information can be provided on audiotape if parents prefer.

Team Responsibilities

The MDT considers assessment data and decides whether the student has a legally defined disability and needs special education services. Team members provide assurances that problems are not the result of linguistic or cultural differences or due to lack of opportunity to learn (Yates & Ortiz, 1998; Yates & Ortiz, 1995). They identify the evidence used to confirm that the disability manifests itself in the native language, not only in English. And, they indicate which data were used to show that problematic behaviors are significantly different than that of peers from the same language group and community. Documentation of previous prevention and early intervention efforts provide the data to rule out lack of opportunity to learn as the cause of achievement difficulties.

. . . .

Team members provide assurances that problems are not the result of linguistic or cultural differences or due to lack of opportunity to learn.

Individualized Education Programs

Native language instruction provides an important scaffold for ELLs with disabilities; if instruction in the native language is not possible, then special education teachers must use ESL strategies (Ortiz, 2000). IEPs for ELLs should thus specify (1) the language of instruction (i.e., native language or ESL) for each goal and objective; (2) the language to be used by related services personnel (e.g., speech therapists); (3) specialized materials and recommended strategies for L1 and L2; and (4) mechanisms for sharing progress data with parents in their native language (Ortiz, 2000; Ortiz & Wilkinson, 1989).

The Least Restrictive Environment

Like their nondisabled peers, English Language Learners with disabilities have the right to bilingual education and/or English as second language services. They should have access to placement alternatives such as the following (Yates & Ortiz, 1998):

Bilingual education classroom with special education consultation. The student is in a bilingual education classroom on a full-time basis. The special educator serves as a consultant, helping the teacher modify native language and ESL instruction to accommodate disabilities.

General education with ESL instruction and special education consultation. General education and ESL teachers use ESL strategies to ensure that instruction is understandable to the learner. The special educator consults with both teachers to ensure that they adapt instruction to meet disability-related needs.

Bilingual special education resource teacher. This teacher provides special education instruction in the native language and/or uses ESL strategies and coordinates instruction with bilingual education teachers.

Special education/ESL resource teacher. The special education teacher uses ESL strategies and works with general education and ESL specialists to ensure the adaptation of instruction to meet disability-related needs. If the student is in a bilingual education classroom, the bilingual educator addresses native language goals and the special educator provides instruction for those goals for which ESL was identified as the appropriate instructional approach. For example, the special educator can work with ELLs with disabilities who are being transitioned from native language to English reading.

Self-contained bilingual special education teacher. The teacher delivers special education instruction in the native language and/or uses ESL strategies, as appropriate.

Self-contained special education/ESL teacher. The teacher provides special education instruction on a full-time basis using ESL techniques.

Whenever possible, special education teachers who are monolingual should be supported by bilingual paraprofessionals (Yates & Ortiz, 1998). Rather than simply interpreting what the teacher is saying, though, the assistant should preview lessons in the

native language that will then be taught by the teacher using ESL strategies. After the lesson, the assistant reviews important content in the native language. In this way, lessons taught in English are anchored by native language support. More importantly, this "preview-ESL lesson-review" sequence allows teachers to retain responsibility for instruction.

Annual Review

The annual review gives MDTs an opportunity to identify students who are not making expected progress. IEPs are then modified and alternative strategies recommended to improve student performance. Since the English skills of ELLs may change dramatically over brief periods of time, more frequent reviews of performance may be necessary than might be true of other special education students. Decisions about continuing special education eligibility or dismissal cannot be made without current language proficiency data. Updating language assessments annually is essential.

Commitment of Special Education Leadership

As the cultural and linguistic demography of schools continues to dramatically change, education systems must reform programs, policies, procedures, and practices to respond to the needs of these students. While there are many complexities and difficulties in developing and managing a systemic response to the educational needs of ELLs with disabilities, it is clear that few, if any, other leadership personnel in the school system can assume responsibility for system change with the same values, training, knowledge, and skills as special education leaders. Reform efforts will be neither short-term nor simple. A beginning point is for special education administrators to become involved in system-wide reform to help ensure that general education programs result in high academic achievement for English Language Learners, and that early intervention is provided in a timely fashion to struggling learners. At the same time, special education processes must be adapted to address both the disability- and language-related needs of English Language Learners.

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Transforming Teaching and Learning to Improve Minority Student Achievement in Inclusive Settings

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- A framework is provided for creating learning environments that maximize the potential of all students.

- Methods are presented for transforming teaching and learning to improve the achievement of students from diverse backgrounds.

- The determination of "goodness" in schools is redefined.

- Attention is given to the shifting roles of educational leadership in a new age.

"How can I teach these kids? They can't pay attention!" An insistent whine of complaint rises and gathers like a sinister haze over classrooms from preschool through college. Rather than serving as a warning, however, it has become a smoke screen for teachers and parents who belabor the young for failing to learn, and for politicians and professors who take potshots at the schools. While the adult community sanctimoniously bewails erosion of academic rigor and achievement, however, it perpetuates the practices that are shortening children's attention spans and rendering their brains unfit to engage in sustained verbal inquiry. Meanwhile, the schools, inundated with students who can't listen, remember, follow sequences of directions, read anything they consider "boring," or solve even elementary problems, have resorted to classifying increasing numbers of students as educationally sick. (Healy, 1990, p. 137)

Healy's notations above reiterate perpetual inconsistencies in efforts to transform the teaching-learning process in general and special education programs. These inconsistencies are reflected in frequent complaints about how students learn, how teachers teach, how parents respond, how communities support, and how state and federal governments legislate. Despite these rhetorics, education is still the most important tool to uplift the citizenry. Dewey (1958) emphasized that education and democracy cannot be divorced from each other. In other words, education has the power to change and uplift human beings. As he pointed out:

> *Education must have the tendency, if it is education, to form attitudes. The tendency to form attitudes which will express themselves in intelligent social action is something very different from indoctrination. . . . There is an intermediary between aimless education and the education of inculcation and indoctrination. The alternative is the kind of education that connects the materials and methods by which knowledge is acquainted with a sense of how things are done; not by impregnating the individual with some final philosophy, whether it comes from Karl Marx or from Mussolini or Hitler or anybody else, but by enabling him [her] to so understand existing conditions that an attitude of intelligent action will follow from social understanding.* (p. 56)

Since education is important in advancing the society, it is imperative that we transform the teaching-learning process to improve minority student achievement in inclusive settings. Such a transformation will not be successful unless we redefine what we mean by "good" students, "good" teachers, and "good" schools (Obiakor, 2000a, 2000b). The question then is: How can the teaching-learning process be transformed to accurately define "good" inclusive settings where minority students achieve academically? In this article, I respond to this critical question.

Transforming Teaching and Learning in Inclusive Settings

To transform the teaching and learning process, minority students must be self-motivated, all teachers must be dedicated to excellence, minority parents must be equal partners, minority communities must be self-directed, and state and federal governments must be involved. We cannot be victims of our circumstances! We must BE INNOVATIVE! Appelbaum (2000) argued that the current teaching-learning process in education needs some administrative shock. In his query, he noted that:

> *Most of us live in a passive state, a kind of daily trance filled with random associations, daydreams, and reactions. How can we awake from a trance-like state to become truly open to the reality that presents itself? A shock is needed, an action to break through the thick crust of ego and penetrate to the depth in ourselves where conscience lies hidden and pristine. . . . A cup already full cannot accept new material. Ultimately, our life teaches us. Whichever angels guide us toward wakefulness, we must be prepared to do our part. Our immediate labor is to ready ourselves so that the seeds of truth, spoken by the teacher, spouse, or stranger may find fertile soil in which to grow. . . . Understanding cannot be handed over from teacher to student like a sackful of grain. Real understanding is the child of knowledge and being. A teacher's greatest gift may be to be a living embodiment of the great mystery and beauty of existence.* (p. 5)

Based on Appelbaum's (2000) assertions, my proposition is that a true transformation will come when we stop politicizing special education, and we begin to do whatever it takes to educate all students. In their book, *Every Child, Every School: Success for All*, Slavin, Madden, Dolan, and Wasik (1996) wrote:

> *Every child can learn. Every school can ensure the success of every child. Statements to this effect appear in goals statements, curriculum reports, and school district offices. They are posted in school buildings and appear as mottoes on school stationery. But does our education system behave as if they are true? If we truly believed that every child could learn under proper circumstances, we would be relentless in the search of those circumstances. We would use well-validated instructional methods and materials known to be capable of ensuring the success of nearly all children if used with intelligence, flexibility, and fidelity. We would involve teachers in constant, collaborative professional development activities to continually improve their abilities to reach every child. We would frequently assess children's performance to be sure that all students are on a path that leads to success, and to be able to respond immediately if children are not making adequate progress. If children are falling behind despite excellent instruction, we would try different instructional approaches and if necessary, we would provide them with tutors or other intensive assistance. We would involve parents in support of their children's school success; we would check to see whether vision, hearing, health, nutrition, or other nonacademic problems were holding children back, and then we would find a solution to those problems. If we truly believed that all children could learn, we would rarely, if ever, assign children to special education or long-term remedial programs that, in effect, lower expectations for children. If we truly believed that all schools could ensure the success of all children, then the failure of even a single child would be cause for great alarm and immediate, forceful intervention.* (p. xi)

I believe transforming the teaching and learning process is painstaking, but it is not impossible. For instance, all students' potential will be maximized to the fullest. The 21st Century school cannot afford to be either (1) a *White* environment nor a *Black* environment; (2) a *Latino* environment nor an *Asian American* environment; (3) a *Native American* environment nor a *special* environment; (4) a *rich* environment nor a *poor* environment; (5) an environment for *smart people* nor an environment for the *not-so-smart people*. Schools must be a place where all the above flourish, that is, an environment where opportunities and choices for growth are created by well-prepared teachers who understand the true meaning of the teaching profession. Simply put, teachers must have the courage to shift their teaching paradigms with their pedagogical power (Dewey, 1958; Henderson & Bibens, 1970; Hilliard, 1992, 1995; Johnson, 1981; Kohl, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Orlich, Harder, Callahan, & Gibson, 2001; Palmer, 1998). Additionally, as "culture" becomes a noncontroversial phenomenon, the *goodness* and *quality* of school and classroom activities increase.

The teachers, students, administrators, parents, and community members are critical participants and responsible for facilitating and contributing to the development of diversity in 21st Century schools. There are also important environmental considerations:

1. Schools must have a "neighborhood feel" to them, regardless of setting (e.g., suburban, urban, rural, or inner-city).
2. Both the distribution of teachers and students should reflect the demographic representation of the communities in which they reside.
3. The ethos of the school environment should promote "quality with heart" and a dedication to excellence.
4. Environments must encourage a sense of belonging for minority students, rather than being an environment that is unwelcoming and indiscriminately encourages leaving.

No one would argue that the teachers have a life-long impact on their students' beliefs and values. It is vital that teachers have "soul" and be culturally competent so that it is possible to hear the multiple voices in the classroom. It is equally important that teachers bring and continue to strive for mastery of their pedagogical skills while remaining grounded in reality. Teachers must be able to respond to issues that minority students bring to the learning environment rather than allowing them to be invisible participants. These issues include individual differences in learning styles, cognition, resilience, and racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

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Pedagogically, teachers must possess the skills necessary to maximize the potential of *all* students to prepare them for the diverse world in which they will live. This includes expanding students' national and global awareness. To accomplish this goal, it will be necessary to go beyond traditional Eurocentric perspectives. In addition, it is necessary to help minority students become responsible and productive citizens through self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-empowerment. To attract such culturally competent teachers, administrators must critically review hiring practices to assess their ability to support the hiring of such teachers. Administrators must also truly care for minority students. This

means continually reviewing the educational practices within their building to evaluate their responsiveness to cultural, racial, and linguistic concerns.

To a large measure, minority parents and community members must also be empowered to participate in their children's school-related activities. Schools for many minority parents are not places that always evoke positive memories. By working collaboratively, consultatively, and cooperatively with minority parents, teachers and administrators can send a message that their participation is welcomed and valued. It is important to create and maintain communities that support and promote learning by everyone involved in the education of children.

Operational Dimensions of the 21st Century Inclusive School

Based on the aforementioned details, it seems clear to me that the 21st Century inclusive school will have four basic operational dimensions, namely:

1. It will function with a Comprehensive Support Model (CSM).
2. It will become a learning community.
3. It will become a place to advance the craft of teaching.
4. It will foster a multidimensional teaching-learning process.

Functioning With a Comprehensive Support Model

Everyone wants an inclusive setting that can meet the needs of *all* students! A truly *good* environment is one where best practices are manifested in all educational programming for *all* students. In such an environment, the Comprehensive Support Model (CSM) must flourish. Based on the CSM, the "self," family, school, community, and government will be collaboratively and consultatively involved. The "self" will be involved because without the personal powers of all entities involved in learning, self-responsibility of minority exceptional learners may not be maximized. The family will be important because it is the cornerstone of the student and the bridge that connects the minority student with the school. The school will be a part of the CSM because it will have teachers and professionals who have the power to shift their paradigms regarding demographic

changes. The communities will be an important part of the CSM because it will provide a variety of opportunities and choices for minority children and youth, parents, schools, and governmental entities to come together. To make the CSM work, the government will not divorce itself from the happenings in families, schools, and communities. Governmental entities will be involved in generating equitable policies that entice the multiple voices of its citizenry.

In an inclusive setting, *all* components of the CSM will listen to each other and communicate as they empower each other. THE BLAME GAME WILL BE OVER as diverse positive forces collaborate, consult, and cooperate for the *common good*. In my dream inclusive setting, the whole village will be at work because "it takes a *responsible* village to raise a *responsible* child" (see Obiakor, 1994). The Milwaukee Catalyst (1998) reiterated these ideas to press for effective educational reforms based on research. This organization highlighted five essential supports for school learning that must be in place to improve school-community relationships. These key forces include:

1. Effective school leadership.
2. Family-community partnerships.
3. A school environment that supports learning.
4. Effective staff development and collaboration.
5. A quality instructional program. (p. 1)

As the Milwaukee Catalyst concluded, "Making practices like these a reality requires major changes—not only in the classroom but also in the way the entire school is run and in its ties with students, families, and the community. Making these changes allows the schools to focus their resources and attention on improving teaching, learning, and student achievement for all children" (p. 2). Community forces must be an integral part of daily functioning. No part of the whole village will be ignored!

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Becoming a Learning Community

According to Peterson (1992), "Community in itself is more important to learning than any method or technique. When community exists, learning is strengthened—everyone is smarter, more ambitious, and productive. Well-formed ideas and intentions amount to little without a community to bring them to life" (p. 2). He added:

> *Life in a learning community is helped along by the interests, ideas, and support of others. Social life is not snuffed out; it is nurtured and used to advance learning in the best way possible. Learning is social . . . The position taken is that learning awakens a variety of internal processes that operate only when the child is interacting with others in his [her] environment and in cooperation with his [her] peers. Even mainstream educators are beginning to recognize that education fails when it focuses solely on the accumulation of demonstrable facts and skill. An image is taking shape that acknowledges a more complex and irreducible phenomenon, the social person.* (p. 3)

It is necessary for a learning community to share learning with a *heart*. In such a learning community, life in the classroom will be less intense and there will be fewer restrictions, labels, and categories. A well-organized learning community leads to holistic teaching. As Peterson (1992) concluded, holistic teaching entails:

1. **Teacher orientation** to help students to grow in complicated and critical ways.
2. **View of knowledge** to help people to construct meaning through experiences.
3. **Meaning-centered teaching** to help knowledge to be personalized as people search for meaning.
4. **Skills** to help to negotiate, express, and develop knowledge.
5. **Curriculum** to help connect students' lives to learning.
6. **Connectedness** to help students to build upon what makes sense to them.
7. **Collaboration** to help students and teachers learn together.
8. **Accountability** to help students to be accountable for their own learning and teachers to be accountable for what they do in the classroom.
9. **Students** who participate in planning and evaluating their education.

10. **Competence** to demonstrate how people express meaning, solve problems, work with others, and critique intelligently.

Becoming a Place to Advance the Craft of Teaching

Good teachers are *good* students. In my dream inclusive setting, teachers will know what it means to be a teacher, and they will value their profession as change agents. Many years ago, Dewey (1960) explained that:

> Constant and uniform relations in change and a knowledge of them in "laws," are not a hindrance to freedom, but a necessary factor in coming to be effectively that which we have the capacity to grow into. Social conditions interact with the preferences of an individual (that are his or her individuality) in a way favorable to actualizing freedom only when they develop intelligence, not abstract knowledge and abstract thought, but power of vision and reflection. For these take effect in making preference, desire, and purpose more flexible, alert, and resolute. Freedom has too long been thought of as indeterminate power operating in a closed and ended world. In its reality, freedom is a resolute will operating in a world in some respects indeterminate, because open and moving toward a new future. (p. 287)

Based on Dewey's statement, teachers will search for answers to problems. In other words, *good* teachers will become liberated as they advance their craft through preservice and inservice trainings. Since my dream inclusive setting will be made up of diverse exceptional students and teachers, individuals who refuse to leave their comfort zones and/or shift their paradigms will be unhappy campers. Simply put, learning is a continuous process of development! Guillaume, Zuniga-Hill, and Yee (1995) postulated that teachers of diverse students should:

1. Develop a knowledge base about diverse ethnic groups and have multiple opportunities to examine personal attitudes toward students of color.
2. Develop culturally and linguistically supportive strategies and approaches that make learning available and equitable for all students.
3. Have ample exposure to students of diverse backgrounds and to teachers who can model appropriate instructional approaches.
4. Commit to professional growth regarding issues of diversity. (p. 70)

I believe to understand teaching is to understand communication. Teachers, principals, and school district personnel will learn to communicate with others. Teachers who are good imparters of knowledge may not necessarily be good communicators. There is a remarkable difference between an imparter of knowledge and a communicator. A good teacher goes beyond simply imparting knowledge. A good teacher teaches as he or she communicates. Effective communication creates workplace success and mutual awareness (Harris-Obiakor, 2000). General and special educators will answer the following questions:

1. Why is effective communication so necessary?
2. What is communication all about?
3. What are the barriers that affect the communication process?
4. What are the tips for being a good communicator?

Good teachers must be good communicators. How many of us have ever wondered why some exceptional students do not follow instructions? Maybe, they do not understand teachers' directions. As a consequence, in my dream inclusive setting, general and special educators will:

1. Understand that communication is a two-way process between the sender and the receiver.
2. Be sensitive and aware.
3. Take great interest in others.
4. Be specific.
5. Keep messages clear in terms that will be understood.
6. Accept the fact that people do things for their personal reasons.
7. Adjust messages to meet circumstances.
8. Be sincere.
9. Know what they do not know.
10. Not be who they are not.

I am convinced that there are tremendous requirements and demands of being a general or special educator (see Hoyle, 1975; Obiakor, Karr, Utley, & Algozzine, 1998). For example, Hoyle described these demands when he noted that:

> The teacher has a much wider public than his [her] pupils and colleagues. Outside the school a number of groups have their own expectations of the teacher's role. These groups include the parents of pupils, local counselors and others who have responsibilities for

education, the members of various voluntary organizations which take an interest in education, and members of Parent-Teacher Associations. In addition, members of the public have their conceptions of the teacher. The degree to which these expectations directly impinge upon the teacher and shape his [her] conception of his [her] role varies from society to society. (p. 69)

These demands require that *good* general and special education teachers develop techniques to survive in today's inclusive classrooms. In my dream inclusive setting, teachers will possess "business beatitudes" (Beattie, 1982) that include character, enthusiasm, courage, responsibility, persistence, endurance, self-control, integrity, confidence, knowledge, determination, ambition, teamwork, and wisdom. In such an environment, general and special education teachers will be frantic as they (1) build the knowledge base, (2) examine the classroom culture, (3) plan and deliver instruction, (4) negotiate the roles of teaching, (5) build self-concepts through self-efficacy, (6) restructure learning environments, (7) enhance learning with technologies and resources, and (8) work beyond the classroom (see Obiakor et al. 1998). Advancing the craft of teaching is to be aware of positive changes that lead to the *common good*. Surely, *good* teachers in my dream inclusive setting will be ready to meet the challenges of the new century. They will expand their learning opportunities, value diversity, consult with minority families and community members, and provide needed support for collaborative systems. "As it appears, educators cannot afford to be divorced from their communities, and their communities cannot afford to be divorced from them. In sum, challenges that face communities will continue to be visible in schools, and the ways educators deal with these challenges will be particularly important in the years ahead" (Obiakor et al. 1998, p. 152).

Fostering a Multidimensional Teaching-Learning Process

As individuals are different so must the teaching-learning process. Ironically, this has not been the precedence in today's inclusive classrooms and schools. Current research and practice on effective schools and effective teaching have been somewhat confusing. For instance, we talk about responding to individual differences as we teach, but very often,

differences are viewed as deficits. In my dream inclusive setting, we will not only talk about differences, we will use them to strengthen and beautify our classrooms. My experiences tell me that people consistently shift their paradigms to respond to society's changes. Additionally, my experiences tell me that those who refuse to shift their paradigms affect others with their retrogressive behaviors; most frequently, people's futures are negatively affected.

I am convinced that *good* general and special education teachers frequently go beyond tradition to challenge their thinking and action. *Goodness* must also go beyond race, culture, language, and socio economics. General and special educators will be challenged, retrained, and retooled. Paley (2000) recounted her experiences in teaching a multicultural classroom of diverse student abilities. In doing this, she presented a model for self-examination of teacher prejudices. Such self-examination is necessary to help minority students reach for the *top*. In spite of personal-emotional challenges posed by her students, Paley remained "capable of setting the limits and confronting children with misperceptions, misunderstandings, contradictions, and self-destructive behavior" (Comer & Poussaint, 2000, p. x). As Paley pointed out:

The challenge in teaching is to find a way of communicating to each child the idea that his or her special quality is understood, is valued, and can be talked about. It is not easy, because we are influenced by the fears and prejudices, apprehensions and expectations, which have become a carefully hidden part of every one of us. (p. xx)

Transforming the teaching and learning process requires a multidimensional and culturally appropriate intervention. Johnson (1981) and Halvorsen and Neary (2001) agreed that multidimensionality should be followed in responding to school order, student interest, school spirit, student discipline, classroom instruction, classroom discussion and mastery, planning class period, study skills, homework, classroom organization, behavior management, selecting and organizing intervals, organizing time, evaluating and testing students, reporting to parents and students, and dealing with written work of students. Even in designing new programs, multidimensionality should be the key! For example, the School District of Shorewood, Wisconsin (1997) enumerated multiple programs that it offers to enrich the minds

of its students. These programs include school newspapers, accelerated reader programs, battle of the books, junior great books, writers' club, literary club, young authors' conference, geography hunt, science fair, special projects, and stock market game. This district also offers a variety of educational activities to provide opportunities and choices for their students. These activities include accelerated courses (e.g., foreign language and orchestra); co-curricular activities (e.g., student council and play production); challenge program activities (e.g., international pen pals and quiz bowl); advanced classes (e.g., anthropology and physics); and extracurriculars (e.g., jazz ensemble and multicultural council). A variety of enrichment programs are necessary to provide a culturally responsive environment that maximizes the fullest potential of minority students with exceptionalities and exposes them to life's realities. Additionally, general and special education teachers who lead these activities will be rewarded through merit pay and other forms of professionally enhancing activities.

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Conclusion

In this article, I have addressed how we can transform the teaching and learning process to improve minority student achievement in inclusive settings. I believe transformation is painstaking, but it is not impossible. To transform the teaching and learning process, we must be willing to try new experiences, cope with changes, see different points of view, be open-minded, participate in group actions, challenge stereotypes, recognize "self" in relation to larger community, acknowledge quality, and respect other cultures, races, and beliefs.

Today, we are witnessing tremendous challenges in our society. The critical question continues to be, "Are our schools ready to confront these

challenges?" My answer is "Yes." We have the power to shift our cultural paradigms if we are truly interested in uplifting individual and collective growth in general and special education. This growth will only materialize when we transform the teaching-learning process to improve minority student achievement in inclusive settings. Our goal must be to educate every child—to do this, we must believe every child can learn. As a consequence, in my dream inclusive setting, we will move beyond tradition on the ways we identify, refer, assess, label, categorize, place, include, and instruct students. General and special education teachers will be *good*, but they will not be puritanic. They will be truly *good* teachers who know who they are, learn the facts when they are in doubt, change their thinking, use resource persons, build self-concepts, teach with divergent techniques, make the right choices, and continue to learn. In my dream inclusive setting, a Comprehensive Support Model that values the contributions of the "self," families, schools, communities, and governments will be in operation. Additionally, this environment will be a learning community where *quality* works with a *heart*. In such an environment, general and special education teachers will continue to advance the craft of teaching, and the teaching-learning process will be multidimensional and culturally responsive.

Finally, the 21st Century school must maximize the fullest potential of *all* learners, *all* teachers, *all* parents, and *all* communities. In such an environment, general and special education teachers will consistently be prepared to learn new ways of looking at students' experiences in their respective classrooms. Smith (1999) concluded that teachers seem unprepared "to give thought to the way students live through a given classroom learning experience, at least in terms beyond their behavioral manifestations and test scores" (p. xxxiii). Apparently, students' experiences will matter and the stories they tell will also matter. Hopefully, these *new* stories will create *new* directions, *new* hopes, *new* visions, *new* paradigms, and *new* traditions. In the words of Smith:

> *Tradition has it that standardized tests, classroom performances on tests, written assignments, special projects, and cumulative grade point averages are the tools used to bracket students off as particular kinds of learners and knowledge seekers and creators. . . . such measurements of learning and knowing do not tell the*

complete story. Without the stories to illuminate the learning journey surrounding such measuring tools, it's not possible to fully understand if what was learned was done to satisfy oneself or someone else. Therefore, in the interest of promoting content mastery beyond a foundational level, assuming of course, that is the goal teachers wish their students to achieve, a curriculum embedded in narratives of its participants, I argue, is an invitation to discover the benefits derived from everyone's unique way of traveling through the classroom maze. (p. 153)

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The Essential Link for Students With Disabilities From Diverse Backgrounds

Forging Partnerships With Families

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- Because more students than ever are from diverse linguistic, racial, and cultural backgrounds and are more likely to be identified as having a disability than other students, it is essential to form partnerships where families are active participants.

- Families of all students, but families of students from diverse backgrounds in particular, need to be actively supported in all educational decision making through ongoing training.

- It is imperative that general and special educators and administrators collaborate closely with families of students from diverse backgrounds and participate in ongoing training activities that stress best practices for facilitating the participation of family.

- When educators, administrators, and parents of students from diverse backgrounds forge positive, proactive partnerships, student achievement is enhanced.

As documented in the year 2000 Census, the demographic profile of the United States is changing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001; see also McLaughlin, Artiles, & Pullin, 2001, this issue of *JSEL*). These changes include shifts in the numbers of Americans from different racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, as well as changes in the composition of the family/household environments in which students live. Such changes have many implications for educators. The increasing diversity of the student population in U.S. schools has fostered greater awareness of how traditional educational practices may be biased toward some student groups, compared to others. Concern for inequality in educational outcomes has long been an area of focus within the field of special education, especially concern for the lower achievement of students from racial, linguistic, and cultural minority groups (Benner, 1998).

The Student's Racial, Linguistic, and Cultural Influence

While there is well-publicized concern with the disproportionate representation of students from diverse backgrounds in special education, individuals from minority groups are no more at risk of having a disability than other groups of people (Harry, 1994). Individuals from minority groups are, however, more likely to be in poverty, which is a significant risk factor for disability (Fujiura & Yamaki, 2000). Indeed, the risk for disability associated with racial or ethnic status increases when poverty and single-parent households are factors (Asbury, Walker, Maholmes, Rackley, & White, 1991; Fujiura & Yamaki, 2000). How data are collected and interpreted affects accurate understanding of the incidence of disability status. As noted by MacMillan and Reschly (1998) and Harry (1994), special education statistics can be reported either as percentage of

students within a disability category/program by minority group or percentage of minority group in disability category/program. Both sets of data reporting methods are important because one indicates the overall representation of minorities in special education and the other indicates the distribution of minorities among categories of disability. It is the disproportionate representation of any given minority group in a specific category that is problematic.

The current and anticipated changes in the racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity of America's schools require a shift in the systems-level thinking about the delivery of special education services. Local, state, and federal regulations regarding eligibility for special education require evidence of a discrepancy between the skills and/or achievement of a particular student and what is expected of all students. This mentality suggests that there is one acceptable level of performance only, and all students are expected to meet this criterion. This mentality is reflected in the widespread use of "high-stakes" tests to evaluate the performance of all students, regardless of background (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The diversity of backgrounds and experience—in terms of race, language, culture, *and* disability—that students bring to school make mastery of one, and only one, common educational experience impossible. Thus, instructional practices for students with special needs, which incorporate awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation of cultural heritage in a dynamic environment are essential.

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The current and anticipated changes in the racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity of America's schools require a shift in the systems-level thinking about the delivery of special education services.

Information about students' racial, linguistic and/or cultural context has traditionally been included in assessment activities; however, in many cases such information has been inferred rather than described. For example, in communities where the student population is homogenous, teachers, special educators, and administrative personnel may have made assumptions about the racial, linguistic, and

cultural experiences of students that were then used as part of the educational decision-making process. As U.S. school populations become more diverse, such inferences are difficult, if not impossible, and may yield incorrect assumptions about a student's personal life experiences and academic potential.

In addition, notions of disability and difference may be confused with minority status (Artiles, 1998; Kauffman, Hallahan, & Ford, 1998). As noted by Artiles (1998), "minority people have been historically seen as different" (p. 32). This assumption rests on a cultural bias regarding the social-cultural norm; individuals see differentness according to their own experience. Those who work in schools must understand and be able to articulate and acknowledge their own cultural biases in order to recognize and be sensitive to the cultural experiences of the students with whom they work.

If schools were to hang on to their perceptions of the community culture and assume that current students' school experiences are the same as those of earlier generations of students, it might lead to stereotypes or discriminatory generalizations and inappropriate evaluation of academic abilities. Obiakor (1999) notes the importance of intra-individual and inter-individual differences and the dangers in assuming that all members of a group share all characteristics. There is the potential for educators in all settings, including urban, suburban, and rural school districts, to erroneously assume that their schools have homogenous student populations. As a result of such shifts in student populations, specific methods for learning about a student's background are needed.

Forging Family Partnerships

Forging partnerships with families through in-depth interviews, home visits, and collaboration among professionals can help to ensure that a student's unique personal attributes are included in the assessment and planning process. The families of students from minority backgrounds are often perceived as not being invested in their child's education. It is understandable why such misperceptions exist. Recent immigrants may be reticent to share a great deal of family background, or may not have language skills that allow for in-depth communication.

In such cases, translators and family representatives may be useful. It is important to consider the accuracy and reliability of the information shared when the informant is not an immediate family member. In addition, there may be disagreement among immediate and/or extended family members regarding a student's role, performance, or behavior. Still, all of the information gained from family and community members is useful in gaining a clearer understanding of the cultural context of a student's school experience and better than the complete absence of information.

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According to Harry, Rueda, and Kalyanpur (1999), when working with families, provision of services should be informed by two principles. First, professionals need to work in a collaborative manner with families; those working with the student must take a broader perspective that focuses on the social-cultural dimensions rather than individual behaviors. Second, it is important to actively include the family in the process of determining what measures will be used to identify, assess, place, and monitor student progress. Furthermore, Serna, Forness, and Nielson (1998), propose that school personnel should invest energy and resources in early detection, primary interventions, and prereferral procedures in order to guard against the misidentifying and misplacing of children from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Collaboration with families is critical because it affects the ability of the family to relate to school culture (Artiles, Aguirre-Munoz, & Abedi, 1998; Luft, 1995). For example, families who have a higher degree of acculturation to U.S. practices are likely to have a better understanding of the culture of schools. In contrast, families with little experience with the larger U.S. culture are less likely to experience optimal family-school interaction. One approach would be to incorporate the following questions adapted from the framework proposed by

Bailey, McWilliam, Darkes, Hebbeler, Simeonsson, Spiker, and Wagner (1998). These questions are organized into two categories, the family's experience and the impact of services provided. The questions are designed to strengthen the collaborative efforts between the families and school personnel.

Experience questions:
- Does the family see the proposed collaboration as appropriate in making a difference in their child's life?
- Does the family see the proposed collaboration as appropriate in making a difference in their family's life?
- Does the family have a positive view of special educators and others involved in the special service system?

Impact questions:
- Did the collaboration enable the family to help their child grow, learn, and develop?
- Did the collaboration enhance the family's perceived ability to work with the professionals and advocate for services?
- Did the collaboration assist the family in building a strong support system?
- Did the collaboration help enhance an optimistic view of the future?
- Did the collaboration enhance the family's perceived quality of life?

Teachers must be encouraged and guided by administrators to take the necessary steps to ensure that student needs are met by setting the stage for collaboration with families. It is important to work closely with the family to enlist their help and support to determine whether or not a behavior is disability related. Using the experience and impact questions above, much can be learned about the family constellation, the language spoken at home, job situations, who cares for the student after school, and any major transitions the family has undergone during the past year.

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Teachers must be encouraged and guided by administrators to take the necessary steps to ensure that student needs are met by setting the stage for collaboration with families.

Parents' experiences will shape how they understand the nature of their children's disabilities and needs. If the meaning the family has attached to words does not match the meaning attached to words by school professionals, this can lead to an improper identification and placement (Harry, 1992). At this point the potential for parents being effective collaborators is lost, contributing to over-, under-, and misidentification of students for special education services.

One approach to collaboration is to understand the family's experience in their own words (Skinner, Bailey, Correa, & Rodriguez, 1999). It is imperative that educators make every effort to understand the associated meanings of words parents use to better meet the needs of their children. For those families who have already reviewed long-range plans, it is possible that their ideas do not match with those of the school, perhaps due to different cultural values and assumptions. Similarly, students who have not considered long-range goals may be interested in various ideas which they have not had the opportunity to explore. In either case, communication among the student, school, and family/community members is essential in order for goals to be logical, culturally relevant, and measurable (Bailey, Skinner, Rodriguez, Gut, & Correa, 1999). Articulation of goals and expectations is especially important in light of the recent emphasis on outcomes measurement (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Jordan, Reyes-Blanes, Peel, Peel, and Lane (1998) have suggested that effective family-school meetings will be facilitated when school personnel pay attention to cultural differences. Special educators who are aware of personal beliefs, values, and expectations are more able to engage further in developing cultural competence. Special educators who build trust with parents of different cultures will learn about their customs and traditions and be more likely to prevent the over- and underidentification of students from diverse backgrounds (Jordan, et al., 1998).

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The Role of the IEP in Forging Partnerships

Once assessment data have been collected and analyzed, an educational program that reflects the needs of the individual student may be prepared. Typically, the first question to be addressed is whether the student is eligible for special education services. This is an important question that may be easy to answer, or not. Traditionally, once a child has been referred, and the special education process is set in motion, it is often difficult to interrupt and change its course. If special education is seen as a stigma by the student and/or his family and community, eligibility and services may be refused (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997). Alternatively, the student's needs may be related primarily to learning a new language, and, thus, the student is not eligible for special education. In such situations, careful communication among the student, family, English as a second language teachers, and other professionals is essential so that needed services are provided (Gersten & Woodward, 1994). Mutual understanding and agreement concerning each student's educational service needs by both families and educators is key to the child's success.

Once a student is found to be eligible for special education, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the document that will facilitate collaboration between families and school personnel. Awareness and appreciation of the student's racial, linguistic, and cultural experiences are important considerations in the IEP planning process. The types of instruction to be provided, time(s) of day when offered, and effect on the student's overall school experience must be considered. If the student will be removed from the classroom during times when he or she has access to activities that are culturally significant (e.g., opportunities to interact with cultural peers), or if the plan includes instruction and activities in English only, it may be perceived by the student as restrictive and designed to force assimilation with the majority culture rather than address a specific personal need (Harry, 1992). Acceptance and incorporation of the student's personal background into the IEP will help to facilitate its correct implementation.

Just as the assessment process needs to be sensitive to the individual needs of each student, the IEP should be implemented and monitored with sensitivity to the unique background the student brings to the learning process. It may be the case that a service will be included in the IEP that will be provided by a specialist with whom the student has not previously worked. Any and all teachers and specialists who work with the student need to acquaint themselves with the student, the student's background, educational needs, and cultural context (Luft, 1995). Only those programs that are appropriately implemented can be adequately monitored and adjusted.

Training Needs for Family-School Collaboration

The training that educators receive plays an important role in how prepared they are to support students from diverse backgrounds and their families. Supervised practice of the application of skills related to providing services to students from diverse backgrounds is a critical component to developing multicultural assessment and teaching competencies. These competencies need to extend beyond the basic use of interpreters and translation of documents (Luft, 1995). Just as the student's family is working to develop cultural competency within the community in which they have chosen to live, educators must work to develop competencies working within the culture of students' families that inhabit the community.

Valles (1998) recommends that preservice training be expanded to, but not limited to, include "general language development, issues related to the acquisition of a second language, and strategies that foster acquisition" (p. 53). Skill acquisition is enhanced through self-reflection, flexibility, and focus on understanding the cultural relativity of our own experiences (Harry, et al., 1999). Harry, et al. (1999) point out that "This kind of program will look quite different from a program that offers lists of characteristics of "other" groups" (p. 133). This training should extend beyond preservice training to inservice training, including competencies in the

identification of and intervention with students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds.

While ideally, it would be optimal to recruit teachers and administrators who possess the necessary competencies to work with students from all diverse backgrounds and with special needs, this is not always possible. There are entire cohorts of educators who began their careers during a time when cultural assimilation was the expectation and individuals with disabilities were educated in substantially separate settings. For these reasons, ongoing training to work with the ever-changing population of students in schools is needed so teachers and administrators will have the support, resources, and feedback they need to be effective. With inservice educators it is even more important to incorporate "perceived needs, concerns, and values of the program participants" so institutional and personal biases concerning culture and disability can be addressed (Gallagher, Malone, Cleghorne, & Helms, 1997, p. 28).

Inservice training that is related to culturally influenced behaviors among minority groups and identifies distinct social behaviors that have been identified with Hispanic American, African American, Native American, and Asian American cultural groups increases educator responsiveness (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997). Inservice training in identifying these behaviors should help discriminate between typical behavior and disability. Such training helps separate individual expectations from cultural practices. In particular, special education teachers and other assessment professionals can play a vital role in helping general education teachers and other school personnel (e.g., principal, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, secretaries) get to "know" their students (Kea & Utley, 1998).

. . . .

...[O]ngoing training to work with the ever-changing population of students in schools is needed so teachers and administrators will have the support, resources, and feedback they need to be effective.

Implications for Practice

Obiakor (1999) suggested a series of questions that school personnel can ask themselves when considering how best to assess and support students from diverse backgrounds. These questions are designed to assist educators as they work with students who are at risk of misidentification, misassessment, misplacement, and misinstruction (Obiakor, 1999).

1. Does the student's language affect my expectations of him or her?
2. What attributes do I bring to teaching and how do they foster achievement of students from diverse backgrounds?
3. Do I present positive models that enhance student development regardless of cultural background?
4. Do I establish appropriate expectations for minority members (i.e., students, parents, and colleagues) in school programs?
5. Is my assessment of individual behaviors appropriate and free from cultural bias?
6. Does my interpretation take into consideration linguistic and cultural differences as I work with students and families?

Educators are in a pivotal position to help families reflect on the experiences and attributes that they bring to the teaching and learning environment and how they might foster their children's achievement.

Conclusion

Students from diverse racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds may be referred for special education services proportionately more often than their peers. As noted, however, students from diverse backgrounds are no more at risk of having a disability than other students. As a result, it is critical that all educators recognize the unique experiences of students from different racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds as part of an overall process of determining the nature of a student's learning needs.

A student's linguistic skills may require more sensitive and careful assessment to determine if a disability actually exists or if school difficulties are the result of the process of language acquisition and adaptation. Administrators and teachers are poised to play a vital role in helping students from diverse backgrounds receive the educational assistance they need by facilitating the use of accurate and non-biased forms of assessment and utilizing assessment results to inform educational planning. It is imperative that educators collaborate closely with the families of students, take advantage of ongoing training opportunities, and implement demonstrated best practices.

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CASE IN POINT:
Addressing Diversity in the Schools

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The cultural make up of the United States is changing as indicated by census reports. A review of the demographics of urban and suburban schools supports this data. For example, in a large urban district there may be as many as 100 or more languages and/or dialects exhibited in the student population. As a result, schools are faced with identifying new ways to address the educational needs of students who come from diverse cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds. In addition, schools must find new ways of communicating with parents so that they are also included and their input valued, as their children are educated in the public school system. This phenomenon requires a mandate for change in the way that schools operate and implement instructional services and standards for students. The data on the nation's changing demographics also provides information to institutions of higher learning regarding the need to plan to include opportunities for prospective teachers to gain knowledge about diverse cultures and learn to appreciate the diverse student population that they will encounter during their years of teaching. Such opportunities may enable new teachers to discard old images and perceptions that may have been negative toward certain ethnic or cultural groups. Teachers currently in the teaching profession must also have opportunities to experience and learn about the important role that diversity plays in the education of their students and the resulting relationship with their students' parents.

One of the greatest challenges in educational reform is to ensure that there is a match between the reform strategies and the cultural differences that children bring to the educational setting. That is, the reforms put into place should not be such that the student must "fit" the reform strategy; rather, the strategy should be flexible enough to embrace the inherent skills and abilities that children from all cultures possess.

Cultural, linguistic, and learning diversity must be integral factors in the planning and implementation of any reform movement. The importance of these three factors is evident in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as this federal law requires that there is recognition of individual differences in the learning process and offers protections to children to ensure that these factors are addressed in the education of students with disabilities.

Providing instruction to all children is a very complex undertaking and requires discussion and collaboration among and between administrators, and general and special education teachers. In the provision of instruction, teachers must be mindful of the impact of the student's culture on the presentation of the content. Therefore, the relationship between the teacher and the learner is probably the most critical relationship in determining the success of students with disabilities. The understanding and acceptance of: (1) diverse ways of learning, (2) alternate forms of assessment of student's progress, and (3) acceptance of diverse cultures may ensure positive educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

Implications for school are:
- Provide opportunities for inservice teachers and preservice teachers to learn about the various cultures that children bring to school.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to gain knowledge about diverse learning styles and the impact of culture on learning styles.
- Accept each child and his parents as individuals with individual differences, which add value to others and enrich their experiences.
- Focus on why the child is not learning and what can be done to ensure that learning occurs rather

than focusing on the culture or ethnic group as the reason why the student is not learning.

- Consider cultural, language, and learning diversity as standards and reform measures are established for all students.

Many schools celebrate diversity. In those schools, students, parents, administrators, and teachers benefit.

About the Author

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Errata

"Aspen," an author's last name referenced in the article *Administrators Evaluate a Professional Development Program for Underrepresented Building and District Administrators in Special Education* (JSEL, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 38, 44) was misspelled. The correct spelling is "Aspedon."

Call For Papers

Manuscript Guidelines and Editorial Policies

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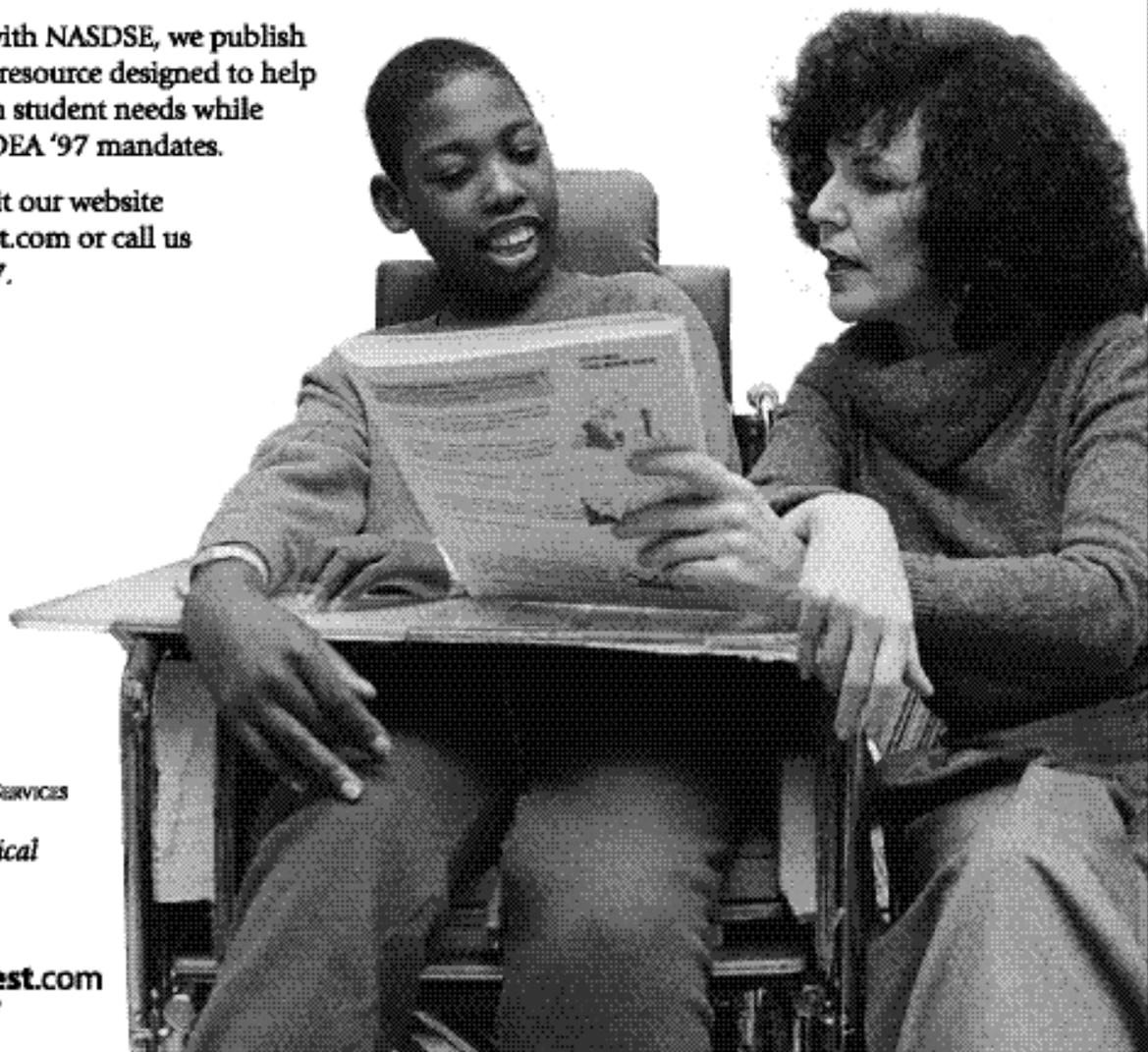
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