Reducing Disproportionate Minority Representation in Special Education Programs for Students with Emotional Disturbances: Toward a Culturally Responsive Response to Intervention Model

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present an argument for the need for culturally responsive Response to Intervention (RTI) as an approach for reducing disproportionate minority representation in Special Education Programs for Students with Emotional Disturbances. We present an overview of the RTI model as initially intended for use in determining IDEA eligibility category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD), discuss current literature that examines the use of RTI for evaluation of Emotional Disturbances (ED), and highlight research-based instruction and intervention practices of culturally responsive pedagogy. Then, we discuss the integration of such practices into an RTI model for the evaluation of ED. Our intent is that through discussion and development of a culturally responsive approach to RTI for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students who display social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties, disproportionate representation and assumption of within-child deficits, can be effectively addressed and remedied.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was rewritten and signed into law in December 2004. The previous version of IDEA placed emphasis on individual student performance assessments administered during the sixty-day IDEA evaluation period. In the case of evaluation for suspected Emotional Disturbance, based on the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team’s (MET) judgment about students’ social/emotional functioning compared against a list of criteria for the eligibility category. Changes in IDEA led to the addition of another way to determine eligibility for Special Education

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and related services, specifically, the Response to Intervention (RTI) model (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). RTI is defined as "an inadequate change in target behaviors as a function of intervention" (Gresham, 2005, p. 331). Initially, the movement toward RTI was promoted as an alternative for the identification of Specific Learning Disability. Determination of a child's eligibility for Special Education under this category previously relied on documentation of a "significant discrepancy" between ability and achievement through the use of standardized assessment tools. Research has demonstrated that the use of this IQ discrepancy model for determination of SLD contributes to the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The improvements in IDEA associated with the use of the RTI eligibility determination model are also being applied to evaluations for other eligibility categories including Emotional Disturbance (Gresham, 2005; Kavale, Holdnack, & Mostert, 2005).

Regardless of the suspected disability "category", the addition of the RTI eligibility determination model to IDEA brings the consideration of interpersonal and institutional factors which may prevent or contribute to students' academic and social/emotional problems. This signifies a shift from the previous evaluation focus of looking for within-child deficits as evidence of disability, to a broader and more contextual analysis of day-to-day interactions and institutional infrastructures that impact student achievement and behavior. RTI also moves away from the "wait to fail" (Klingner et al., 2005) mentality special education has historically been accused of supporting, where children have to struggle significantly before receiving specialized support. Just as RTI supports broadening the unit of analysis and considering a child's strengths and needs within educational and cultural contexts, RTI also stresses the use of evidence-based intervention practices before special education referral. This marks an important acknowledgement of the general education setting as where we must place responsibility for student progress.

The use of the RTI approach implies that general education must assume active responsibility for the delivery of high quality instruction, research-based interventions, and prompt identification of individuals with disabilities, while collaborating with families as well as special education personnel. As discussed above, RTI focuses on broader contextual factors which impact student achievement and behavior. Arguably, the most relevant factors to consider are related to culture: the culture of individuals and institutions and the interactions that take place between and within them. Varenne and McDermott (1999) go beyond the more traditional definition of culture as "con-
cepts, symbols, and beliefs found among a people” to add that “an adequate cultural description must show such concepts, symbols, and beliefs in use and legitimately enforced in local situations populated by real people” (p. 27). This useful description of culture can be applied to the continued reliance on the subjective judgment of the MET for determination of high incidence eligibility categories (i.e., SLD, ED, and Mild Mental Retardation). Without consideration of how culture mediates and influences everything we do, the potential for inappropriate eligibility decisions are still present if the team does not apply a Culturally Responsive RTI model to such determinations.

According to Klingner and other authors (2005):

Culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the beliefs that all culturally and linguistically diverse students can excel in academic endeavors when their culture, language, heritage, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate their learning and development, and they are provided access to high quality teachers, programs, and resources. (p. 8)

Interventions designed for CLD students with teacher/staff perceived social, emotional, and/or behavioral difficulties must be designed with attention to institutional, personal, and instructional practices that are “research-based” within the CLD student population for which they are being implemented (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Klingner, Sorrells, & Barrera, in press). Without consideration of culturally responsive instruction, discipline, and interventions within all stages of the RTI decision making model, there is continued possibility of misinterpretation of student behavior and emotional well-being as disordered.

The purpose of this article is to present an argument for the need for culturally responsive RTI as an approach for reducing disproportionate minority representation in the IDEA eligibility category of Emotional Disturbance. We chose to focus on the eligibility category of ED due to what we consider as a need for more analysis of the application of RTI beyond evaluation for SLD. We also focus on ED due to the high level of subjectivity related to referral for and determination of this eligibility category in which CLD students are both under and overrepresented. We present an overview of the RTI model as initially intended for use in determining IDEA eligibility category of Specific Learning Disability, discuss current literature that examines the use of RTI for the IDEA eligibility category of Emotional Disturbance (ED), and highlight research-based instruction and intervention practices of culturally responsive pedagogy. Then, we discuss the integration of such practices into an RTI model for the evaluation of ED. Our intent
is that through discussion and development of a culturally responsive approach to RTI for CLD students who display social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties, disproportionate representation and assumption of within-child deficits can be effectively addressed and remedi-

**Defining RTI**

Broadly defined, Response to Intervention is based on systematic procedures involving general education interventions attempting to resolve students’ present difficulties accompanied by a form of progress monitoring (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003). “A response-to-intervention model necessitates using decision making methods that use graduated increases or decreases in intensity to demonstrate the initial and ongoing need for special services” (Barnett, Daly, Jones, & Lentz, 2004, p. 68). “When a child fails to respond at one level of assistance, more resources and greater expertise are brought to bear at the next higher level” (Fuchs et al., 2003, p. 163). As the child’s needs increase, the amount of educational resources increases providing the necessary interventions to support the child’s growth.

RTI is comprised of several core components: (a) general education takes active responsibility for providing all students with high quality instruction in the general education setting; (b) the progress of all students is continually monitored; (c) for those students not making expected progress, research based interventions are provided; and (d) students not responding to interventions are recommended for special education evaluation. These components are based on the premise that all students receive research-based instruction in the general education setting, and that the learning of all students is assessed early and often. Concerns about groups of students’ or individual students’ progress lead to increasingly intensive tiers of interventions, and only students who are considered “unresponsive” to general education instruction and interventions are considered for special education eligibility.

**Basic Versions of RTI**

Two basic versions of RTI are the problem solving model and the standard protocol model. In the problem solving model, students’ deficits are addressed by implementing research-based intervention. Typically, there is focus on individual student problems as identified by teachers or parents. Supporters of this model believe student characteristics do not necessarily dictate what intervention will work and recognize that a specific research-based intervention will not work with every student (Fuchs et al., 2003). The standard protocol model
provides students with difficulties research-based intervention that has been standardized and proven effective for students with similar difficulties. Fuchs et al., (2003) also describe a hybrid of the problem-solving and standard protocol RTI models, called “collaborative problem solving,” which uses a four-step problem solving process (identify, analyze, implement, and evaluate) in conjunction with the problem solving process.

Within the RTI model presented by Klingner and Edwards (2006), the four tiers include: (1) the first tier considers the quality of instruction within the general education classroom paired with an ongoing progress monitoring; (2) the second tier provides intensive interventions; (3) the third tier consists of the use of a teacher teaming approach, such as Teacher Assistant Teams (TAT) or Child Study Teams (CST) that develop interventions for students who continue to display a need for individualized, direct support; and (4) the fourth tier addresses the assessment of the severity of academic skill deficit and evaluates the need for special education. As much of the work in RTI is focused on an academic skill deficit as the problem, the fourth tier would focus on assessment of the severity of the emotional/behavioral skill deficit for the purposes of ED consideration.

**Rationale for RTI in determination of ED**

Response to Intervention may be considered one of the most promising preventative approaches for reducing minority disproportionate representation in ED. Research indicates that by implementing early intervention, central to the RTI model, educators are able to decrease the scope and the severity of the difficulties faced by students at-risk for emotional behavior disorders (O'Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham, & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2003). However, there appears to be more emphasis in the literature on the use of RTI for the evaluation of learning disabilities as compared to ED, and the many potential benefits associated with the use of the RTI model for the evaluation of learning disabilities. Vaughn and Fuchs (2003) discuss these benefits, which include the following: (a) students are identified as learning disabled using a “risk” model, rather than a “deficit” model; (b) identification bias is reduced because there is less emphasis on teacher judgment and referral; (c) there is more attention given to student outcomes; (d) because the focus is on intervention within the general education setting, general education teachers receive more immediate assistance rather than waiting for the completion of an IDEA evaluation; and (e) students with learning disabilities receive more immediate intervention rather than waiting for the completion of an IDEA evaluation.
Gresham (2005) examined the questions of whether or not RTI may have the same or different potential benefits for the evaluation of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD). Unlike CLD students' overrepresentation in the special education category of SLD, children with serious emotional, behavioral, and social problems often are unserved or underserved in educational settings. Under 1 percent of the United States' school age student population is identified and receives special education services as Emotionally Disturbed (ED) (Merrell & Walker, 2004). Although prevalence data varies state to state and district to district, and is heavily tied to cultural and linguistic background of students, nationally, CLD students are disproportionately underserved in this special education eligibility category. Data demonstrates that African-American students are at highest risk for identification and overrepresentation as students with Emotional Disturbance (ED) than any other racial/ethnic group (National Research Council, NCR, 2002). Also, although there is no evidence that Hispanic students are overrepresented when using national datasets, there is evidence that this racial/ethnic group has elevated disproportionate rates when state or district data is examined (Finn, 1982). Moreover, the ED category has the greatest degree of variability in prevalence of any IDEA disability category (Hallahan, Keller, & Ball, 1986; Merrell & Walker, 2004).

While the use of RTI for the intervention and evaluation of students with learning disabilities has been widely examined, the potential use of such a model for use with students exhibiting emotional, behavioral, or social difficulties has been largely ignored. The subjective nature of determining ED continues to be a problem that could be addressed through the use of an RTI model. The model works to ensure that all students who exhibit emotional, behavioral, or social difficulties receive interventions within the general education setting. Gresham (2005) presents ways to operationalize students' response to emotional/behavioral interventions within the RTI problem-solving model. The central issue in determining eligibility for special education is first determining adequate or inadequate response to intervention.

The operationalization of student response to interventions is relevant to ED eligibility determination in order to reduce the subjectivity extensively documented as a central problem in the ED eligibility category (Forness & Knitzer, 1992; Gresham, 1999; Skiba & Grizzle, 1991; Walker, Ramsay, & Gresham, 2004). We will not review these methods for the purposes of this article. Rather, we focus on the design and the implementation of validated, research-based intervention protocols and procedures that the RTI model demand teams utilize,
and the specific interventions that are applied to students who display emotional, behavioral, and social needs. Moreover, we concentrate on the procedures that are delivered within educational systems appropriately addressing the emotional, behavioral, and social learning of all students through the use of culturally responsive, proactive instruction and discipline for CLD students.

**Challenges of Using a Culturally Responsive RTI Model**

**Problem Identification and Problem Analysis Stages**

The problem-solving model of RTI is grounded in literature connected with behavioral consultation, which is inductive, empirical, and focused on the problem behavior (Bergen & Kratochwill, 1990). Due to its inductive nature, such a model rejects the notions that specific student characteristics dictate what intervention will work, and that specific interventions will be effective for all students belonging to a specific group such as race, gender, social class, etc. (Fuchs et al., 2003). Although it is important to design interventions specific to each child referred to the RTI team, we assert that it is challenging, yet necessary to consider sociocultural factors that may influence students' behavior. These factors include student cultural and linguistic background, teachers' background and potential biases, and institutional and societal factors impacting interpersonal relationship and student opportunities.

In order to most effectively teach a diverse student population, Banks (1998), Cloud (2002), and Moll and Greenberg (1990), present approaches to designing and implementing curriculum and instructional practices that incorporate students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as “funds of knowledge” (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Such approaches are in response to the use of standard curriculum that is the same for all students, delivered in the same manner, and over the same amount of time, ignoring the individual and cultural strengths of those for whom it is designed. This form of standard curriculum merely reproduces socio-historical hierarchies within the educational and societal environments and serves to continue the disenfranchisement of cultural and linguistic minority students, as well as students of low economic status.

We assert that classroom instruction and practices must be “Culturally Responsive” (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2004). “Culturally Responsive classrooms specifically acknowledge the presence of culturally diverse students and the need for these students to find relevant connections among themselves and with the subject matter and the tasks teachers ask them to perform” (Montgomery, 2001, p. 4). These connections must be applied to the first tier of RTI which considers the
quality of instruction within the general education classroom paired with ongoing progress monitoring. Similar considerations must be applied to the design and implementation of interventions for individual students.

The RTI Problem-Solving model for students displaying emotional/behavioral difficulties is applied by evaluating how a student responds to interventions across the four stage process described above. One of the first challenges of the RTI model lies within the problem identification and problem analysis stages. While the problem identification stage of RTI problem-solving model includes the collection of baseline data of a specific, observable problem behavior. The problem analysis stage places focus on instructional and student variables that may help formulate a solution to the problem.

Moving Beyond the Conceptualization of the Problem as Within-Child

The second challenge is the need to move beyond the conceptualization of the problem as "within-child", as is inherent in the definition of Emotionally Disturbed as it appears in the most recent version of IDEA (2005) found in section 300.7(c). The term is defined as:

A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:
(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances
(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression;
(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance. (IDEIA, 2005)

Indicated during the problem identification stage of the RTI model is the definition of the problem as the child's behavior. Although changes in instruction are considered as possible contributing solutions to such a problem, there is little focus on teachers' or others' behavior as being included in the problem definition. In other words, the problem is defined only as what the student is doing "wrong," by pinpointing an observable behavior the student carries out. We propose that the problem may lie elsewhere. An RTI team must broaden
the scope of the defined problem to include other factors related to student behavior and learning. These factors include culture and language, teacher perception, bias, knowledge, and background, as well as school and societal factors and obstacles for student development. We assert that the emphasis on the student's response to an intervention or interventions, shift to an emphasis on the importance of the interventions as responsive to the child.

Reason Behind the Referral

A third challenge associated with the use of a culturally responsive problem-solving model of RTI with culturally and linguistically diverse students is to understand the reason behind the referral which is a significant factor in special education placement (Hoover & Collier, 1985). Most often it is the general education teacher that begins this referral process. Practitioners need to acknowledge their assumptions about difference, culture, and space in order to improve the experience of CLD students who are overrepresented in special education (Artiles, 2003). Data supports that once a child is referred for evaluation, there is a high probability of that student being determined eligible for such services, therefore labeled as disabled (Algozzine, Ysseldyke, & Christenson, 1983). Thus, teacher attitudes, perceptions, expectations, and knowledge should be considered given that they are typically the ones making the referrals. Consider, for example, African American males, who are overwhelmingly overrepresented in the ED category (Fierros & Conroy, 2002; Parrish, 2002).

Since almost all students are referred to the RTI team by the teacher, and in the case of referral to the RTI team for an African American male, we must consider why the referral is being made in order to determine the appropriateness of the referral. For instance, Harry and Anderson (1994) discuss the role of teacher perception in the referral process, and the subjective and ambiguous nature of such perceptions. A teacher's perception of a student's behavior as problematic is shaped by individual experience and institutional parameters of acceptable behavior. Perception of a problem by the referring teacher is compounded by bias that is part of all informal judgments, as well as the formal assessments which also take part for students throughout the referral process. However, "teachers often do not take into account their own contributions to students' behavioral and learning patterns" (Harry & Anderson, 1994, p. 611).

Determining Appropriate Assessment

The final challenge associated with the RTI problem solving model presented within this paper is related to determining appro-
appropriate assessment as part of the RTI process. A persistent issue with assessment is the misuse of instruments and misinterpretation of results, which have significantly adverse effects on children, especially those from different cultures (Hoover & Collier, 1985). Further, one must consider the assessment process along with the child and the assessment instruments to truly appreciate the contextual aspects of testing and outcomes, which are necessary when considering placement and instruction of students (Anderson et al., 1998).

**Toward Culturally Responsive Response to Intervention**

As stated earlier, without consideration of culturally responsive instruction, discipline, and interventions within all stages of the RTI decision making model, there is continued possibility of misinterpretation of student behavior and emotional well-being as disordered. Moreover, culture plays an important role in shaping the thinking processes of individuals and groups as well as in reciprocal processes of communicating and receiving information. Response to Intervention models must recognize that culture is central to learning and by implementing culturally responsive pedagogy, all students will have the opportunity to learn within the RTI model. Culturally responsive pedagogy draws on cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students in order to make learning more appropriate and effective for them, as well as teaching to and through the strengths of students (Gay, 2000).

In the next section, we describe several dimensions of a culturally responsive approach to RTI for students at risk for ED. These approaches may prevent these misinterpretations. We use the term dimension because it refers to the multiple layers and interrelationships embedded within each topic. These specific dimensions include: (a) home, school and community connections; (b) professional development; (c) curriculum and instruction; and (d) assessment.

**Home/School/Community Connections**

The home, school, community dimension focuses on the effectiveness of relationships among the three. Ladson-Billings (1994) proposed the importance of meaningful connections between home and school experiences as well as between academic constructs and lived sociocultural realities. Research clearly supports the effectiveness of home and community and the relationships between families and schools. Because families serve as the most valuable resource in the development of their children, the involvement of families helps strengthen the social and emotional competence of their children (Nieto, 2004).
Bridging societal, school, and family factors that influence and shape student behavior begins with recognizing cultural differences. Families' and cultural groups' historical interactions with education and schools influence their current education-related experiences. Previous negative experiences with schools may lead to current misunderstandings. Simultaneously, educators' previous experiences with education and families, particularly with students and families of backgrounds other than their own, may lead to misinterpretations of student behavior and familial involvement in schools.

One potential misunderstanding between educators and CLD students and families is student behavior that is perceived as problematic by schools, but not within the child's home context. Schools' perceptions about behaviors exhibited by specific students may be construed as maladaptive, rather than considered within the cultural norms of the student.

Schools' misperceptions of student behavior may represent their stock in negative stereotypes associated with diverse groups or lack of recognition of within cultural groups. Similarly, schools' deficit ideologies about low-income racial and language minority students impact student referral and placement practices. (NCCRESt, 2005). At times, assumptions are made that all members of a particular cultural group (i.e. African American, Asian, Latino/a, Native American) share the same beliefs, values, and practices. The unique characteristics of every CLD individual and family within particular cultural groups often go unnoticed within the contexts of schools (Nieto, 2004); they must be recognized. As we begin to build critical relationships between the home, school, and community, we must bear in mind these important considerations. Thus, we must assess the perceptions and ideologies across the three areas (i.e., home, school and community) in order to identify and incorporate culturally responsive interventions. In particular, schools must place special consideration of the home environment and what students bring into the academic setting if they are to minimize the misunderstanding of student behavior in the school.

**Professional Development**

The professional development dimension focuses on the cognitive and emotional aspects of pedagogy. Teachers and staff members need to be cognizant of individual and institutional biases that influence decisions made within the school environment. “Research suggests that unconscious racial bias, stereotypes, inequitable implementation of discipline policies, and practices that are not culturally responsive may contribute to the observed patterns of identification and placement for many minority students” (Lehr & McComas, 2005,
np.). By revealing and examining their biases, teachers and staff members will be more apt to respond to the needs of their diverse students by creating classrooms based on trust and respect. In many situations, teachers interpret and respond to their students' behaviors from the perspective of mainstream cultural norms (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clark, 2003). This may lead to discrimination against students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds grounded in a misunderstanding of children's behavior and interpretation of such behavior as atypical, abnormal or problematic. Thus, teachers may misidentify, misplace and/or misunderstand CLD students' potential (Hillard, 1992).

Through continual teacher training efforts, we can help broaden teachers' perspectives beyond the individual student's behavior as problematic to include teachers' or others' behaviors. Professional development activities should be designed in ways that encourage communities of practice that focus on defining norms for analysis of student behaviors that are perceived as problematic through a cultural and linguistic lens. Professional development activities should also include analysis of classroom and systems factors that may be implicated as to why a student is behaving in a particular way.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

The curriculum and instruction dimension focuses on culturally responsive curriculum design and instructional practices. This dimension includes several key aspects that may decrease the likelihood for ED misidentification. The primary focus of this dimension includes the acknowledgement of the cultural heritage of different ethnic and linguistic groups affecting students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches toward learning as well as addressing the worthiness of the curriculum content which takes place within the instructional dimension (Ladson-Billing, 1994). The success of instruction depends on the knowledge of the teacher in areas of linguistics, culture, and cognition. It is important for teachers to familiarize themselves with the cultural history and practices of their students and the implications of such on student learning and behavior. However, it is possible to be culturally responsive and competent without having extensive information about and exposure to the cultural and linguistic background of every student in one's classroom. Several points to consider when designing instructional practices include: (a) the use of grouping practices that do not reinforce tracking; and (b) the inclusion of topics of inquiry centering on the cultural relevance to the learners.

A culturally responsive RTI approach also ensures that students receive appropriate instruction in the general education classroom
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(Klingner, Sorrell, & Barrera, in press). This illustrates a shift in thinking of the problem as located only within the child, and broadens the scope of problem analysis to the broader institutional setting of the school or classroom. By focusing on the opportunity to learn in the general education settings, educators can work within an intervention framework addressing the educational performance of all learners. Educational performance of learners includes not only the academic performance but also the social, affective, and vocational domains (Gresham, 2005). As indicated in the first tier, Response to Intervention models must be grounded in students' exposure to adequate opportunity to learn in the general educational setting. Researchers have indicated the existence of a relationship between low academic achievement and problem behaviors (Trout, Nordness, Pierce, & Epstein, 2003). Therefore, the increase in academic engagement through opportunities to learn in the general education setting may reduce incidences of problem behaviors and eventual referrals for special education.

Another culturally responsive instruction begins with building on students' prior knowledge, interests, motivation, and home language. Teachers need to locate students' current level of knowledge on various dimensions beginning their instruction at that point (Harry & Anderson, 1994). This can be accomplished by administering questionnaires that find out what they are interested in, setting up individual conferences to gather more information and taking time to observe them in social situations (i.e. working in groups or with partners).

In order to support students' learning, culturally responsive teachers use various forms of scaffolds. Scaffolds can include supporting students self-regulated decision making processes through a teacher mediated intervention. Another form of scaffolding includes a peer-mediated intervention. In their review of the research on peer-mediated interventions, Ryan, Reid, and Epstein (2004) found that several forms of peer-mediated interventions have proven to be effective for students with ED in relation to making academic gains.

Within instructional practices, meaningful learning activities need to be created and connected with students' home cultures and their repertoire of behaviors. Rather than attempting to shape children's behaviors to the confines of school structure and control, teachers need to be informed of and sensitive to the differential experience of their students. More importantly, teachers must design instruction based on what works, with whom, in what contexts, and under what circumstances (Klingner, Sorrells, & Barrera, in press).
An example of culturally responsive curriculum that utilizes students' funds of knowledge (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) can be found in Carol Lee's use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the teaching of critical analysis skills as applied to African American literature and short films shown on MTV (Music Television). Students who were traditionally corrected when using AAVE in classrooms, were taught about how AAVE's use of metaphor, quick wit, and vivid imagery could benefit one's analysis of literature and film, which capitalized on students' strengths and communication forms they were familiar with (Lee, 1997).

An additional aspect of culturally responsive instruction within the general education setting includes the student-teacher relationships. Student-teacher rapport based on caring, respectful, participatory relationships are critical factors in whether a student learns. Nieto (2004) asserts that students who are connected and involved with school are more motivated to learn. A caring relationship with a teacher provides the student with the motivation for wanting to succeed. Morse (1994) writes about the role of caring in teaching children with behavior problems. In his work with teachers, Morse (1994) reveals several common attributes associated with teachers identified as caring:

They knew their pupils and had a deep empathy for the stress in their youngsters' lives. They faced unacceptable behavior without panic. They were not permissive. They worked out what they considered was best for the child even if it caused pain and resistance. In short, these exemplar teachers all cared deeply about their charges, although they each expressed that caring in different ways. (p. 133)

Classrooms need to be places where students and teachers live and talk with each other. Understandably children will work harder and do things for people they love and trust (Nodding, 1988). Several studies examining student's perceptions on caring as a teacher attribute indicate that they work harder when they feel their teachers care for them both personally and academically (Alder, 2002; Alder & Moulton, 1998).

One final aspect to consider is that culturally responsive instruction needs to be accompanied by a form of on-going progress monitoring system. Gresham (2005) purports the use of "best practices" instructional or behavioral interventions for students at-risk for behavioral disorders needs to be tied to individual adequate progress. As students make academic progress through active participation, evidence suggests that increased student participation also leads
to a reduction in disruptive and off-task behaviors for student with emotional and behavioral disorders (Sutherland, Alder, & Gunther, 2003). Historically, many students identified with ED have high risks for academic failure which can be displayed through problem behavior (Anderson et al., 1998). Through the use of an ongoing progress monitoring system, the success of the instruction and/or intervention can be tracked and adjusted. Kameenui and Carnine (1998) reported that interventions using progress monitoring and instructional adjustment serve to increase students' academic engagement and successful academic performance, therefore helping to prevent behavioral difficulties.

Assessment

The assessment dimension focuses on culturally responsive procedures for assessing ED (McIntyre, 1996). First, an examination of the student's records is needed to review how differences in cultural background have been considered, if at all (Hoover & Collier, 1985; McIntyre, 1996). In addition, it is important to evaluate teachers' own backgrounds and their awareness of behavioral and learning styles of students with cultural backgrounds different from their own (McIntyre, 1996). Interviews should be conducted with school personnel, the student, and the student's family to evaluate perceptions that might vary across settings (Anderson et al., 1998; McIntyre, 1996). For instance, it is important to determine how the student and his/her family consider concept of time, locus of control, and concepts of cheating/stealing, which could be misinterpreted as defensive, disorganized or aggressive behaviors (Hoover & Collier, 1985). Thus, evaluations must be contextually grounded and jointly constructed by the student, his/her family, and school personnel (Anderson et al., 1998; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2003).

Within the referral process, the practice of assessment is expanded to include measurements of child's progress over time rather than engaging in formal assessments administered by a specialist. This form of assessment lends towards monitoring students progress derived from multiple sources, contexts, and assessment procedures (Anderson et al., 1998). For example, Figueroa (2002) recommends the use of classroom observations and the collection of student work over time to help inform assessment and instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Observations are necessary to determine frequency and duration of behavior; however, it is also necessary to determine why a behavior occurs through a functional behavioral assessment. Data gathered through checklists and other behavioral measures can provide useful information in the assessment process.
In particular, it has been recommended that culturally valid assessment consider both etic (i.e., universal perspective) and emic (i.e., perspective of the child within a target culture) orientations (Anderson et al., 1998).

Selected instruments for assessing culturally diverse students should be proven cross-culturally equivalent, tested extensively to be psychometrically sound, and have high face validity (Anderson et al., 1998). Given that many behavioral instruments are developmentally normed primarily with European American children and behaviors, results from such instruments should be used with caution (McIntyre, 1996). In addition to checklists and instruments that evaluate various behaviors, it is also necessary to include an examination of the curriculum, and behavioral requirements in the school setting to determine the expectation of the school as well as the student’s awareness and understanding of such expectations. Teacher attitudes are an often overlooked but an equally important piece of information that helps determine cultural awareness and knowledge of how to modify instruction and adapt behavior management procedures. Finally, a member of the same cultural background group as the student, as well as the family, should be involved in the discussion of the assessment findings and eligibility determination.

By recognizing that culture is central to learning, students may become more responsive to interventions grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy thus impacting the growth and progress of all learners. Implementing a more culturally responsive approach towards RTI has the potential to reduce the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students misidentified, misplaced and misunderstood within the category of ED. We assert that being culturally responsive is more than a set of practices. Rather, cultural responsiveness provides an additional and necessary dimension to the RTI framework that impacts all levels of intervention for all students.

Conclusion

This paper presents a culturally responsive Response to Intervention model as an approach for the appropriate eligibility determination of CLD students as ED, following intensive early interventions for students at risk for greater academic or behavioral difficulties. Since learning and emotional and behavioral problems appear to be progressive in nature, early intervention tends to be more effective than a remedial approach (Lane, Gresham, & O'Shaughnessy, 2002). In order to begin reducing disproportionate representation of CLD students in the Special Education category of Emotional Disturbance, we must place culture and the ways in which culture mediates behav-
ior and learning at the forefront of intervention design, implementation, and eligibility determination. Our view considers language and culture as factors that must be considered and understood in the design and implementation of academic and social/behavioral interventions so that all students have increased opportunities to succeed.

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