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Developing Collaborative Partnerships with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families
during the IEP Process

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Abstract

Family participation in the special education process has been federally mandated for 40 years, and educators recognize that effective collaboration with their students' families leads to improved academic and social outcomes for students. However, while some family-school relationships are positive and collaborative, many are not, particularly for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families. This article provides practice guidelines based in research for teachers who seek to improve their practices when working with CLD families who have children served by special education.

Key words: families, collaboration, cultural and linguistic diversity, individualized education program

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Meagan, an undergraduate student teacher studying special education, volunteered to take notes in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting for a recently immigrated Chinese family whose child was diagnosed with disabilities. Meagan's professor (the second author) had been contacted by a cultural outreach coordinator from the local urban Parent Training and Information Center in search of someone who could "simply take notes" for the family because they already had scheduled an interpreter. Megan later told her professor that the meeting seemed well-organized and conducive to what she had learned in class as illustrative of effective collaboration. The mother "was knowledgeable about her rights and her son," and she seemed to adopt the Western role of parent advocate. The family had received a translated copy of assessment results and a tentative agenda beforehand. During the meeting they were asked questions about what was important to them and what they thought about the possible recommendation options offered by school personnel to support their child. Meagan felt she had learned a lot from the direct experience and was happy to be of help to the family.

Then Meagan was asked by the interpreter if she would take notes for another IEP meeting scheduled at a nearby school with a different family. She agreed, but she soon discovered that this meeting was to be very dissimilar from the first one. While this meeting also involved an immigrant family, the parents "spoke little to no English" and they would need to rely heavily on the interpreter. But there was miscommunication about the language needed; the interpreter could speak Cantonese and Mandarin, but the family's home language was Vietnamese. Since the mother could understand Cantonese, that was the language the translator used, but the father was excluded. There was a district-appointed advocate for the family and

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Meagan described the meeting as adversarial and very tense, ending “with no compromises or solutions.” The idiosyncratic language and the fast pace of the conversation, along with the time it took for the live language interpretation, seemed to contribute to the tension. Meagan was troubled that the family appeared discouraged as their concerns were not addressed before the school indicated their time was up and the teachers had to return to their classrooms. Although the family requested the forms be translated into their native Vietnamese and sent to them, the district employees said they did not have the resources to comply with their request. Meagan wondered, “How could these two IEP meetings differ so significantly?”

Unfortunately, we know that teachers might have experiences more like Meagan’s second IEP meeting than her first. There has been a consistent vision for multicultural education and family collaboration in teacher preparation programs for decades, yet collaborative partnerships between culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families¹ and their children’s educators remain elusive (Harry, 2008; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008). Some teachers may not even realize that families with whom they work feel frustrated with what they perceive as ineffective and culturally insensitive IEP meetings. However, many teachers recognize a sense of disconnection between schools and CLD families, and are seeking ways to improve these relationships.

Family engagement in special education has been federally mandated for 40 years, since Public Law 94-142 was passed in 1975 and later reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). In fact, IDEIA 2004 emphasized family engagement in their children’s education as a critical element in improving the effectiveness of special education programs (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2011). Indeed, family

¹ Following Wolfe and Duran (2013), we defined CLD families in the United States as those whose primary language is not English and/or who are not European American. We also use “family” in this article to acknowledge those children for whom it may be a guardian or extended family member who represents them as part of the IEP.

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engagement is related to positive student outcomes in special education (Newman, 2004; Ryndak, Alper, Hughes, & McDonnell, 2012). However, many families have indicated a lack of collaboration during the IEP process and have frequently felt that they must fight for services for their children (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Resch et al., 2010; Turnbull et al., 2011).

These difficulties interacting with the special education system can be even more prevalent for CLD families who do not typically experience collaborative partnerships with their children's school professionals (Fults & Harry, 2012; Harry, 2008; Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010). CLD families can face several barriers to such collaboration from schools: (a) a lack of cultural responsiveness, (b) inappropriate accommodations related to language, (c) insufficient information about team meetings, (d) little respect for familial expertise and contributions, and (e) deficit views of families and children (Harry, 2008; Wolfe & Duran, 2013). In studies of IEP participation, CLD families attended most meetings but were not provided opportunities to contribute due to hierarchical interactions with school personnel and marginalization of families by school personnel (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdes, 2012). IEPs and parents' rights documents have frequently been written in ways that are difficult to understand (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006; Lo, 2014). Assessment results and other materials have not been routinely translated in time for IEP meetings, and skilled interpreters experienced in special education have not been consistently provided at IEP meetings despite being federally mandated (Lo, 2012; Wolfe & Duran, 2013).

Without family engagement in special education, CLD students can be vulnerable to lesser quality and more segregated education programs, as well as faulty diagnostic processes (Gay, 2002; Harry, 2008). Moreover, as today's public schools continue to become more diverse, the majority of pre-service teachers are still from White, middle-class backgrounds; this dynamic

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can result in a cultural divide in which teachers subsequently hold deficit views and lower expectations for CLD students (Castro, 2010; Sleeter & Owuor, 2011). We contend that positive outcomes for CLD students can be achieved and this divide can be bridged when schools and families engage in culturally responsive collaborative partnerships (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2004; Gay, 2002; Haines, Gross, Blue-Banning, Francis, & Turnbull, 2015; Harry, 2008). As Fults and Harry (2012) explain, “In a multicultural world, it is not possible to be family centered without being culturally responsive” (p. 28).

The lack of culturally responsive collaborative partnerships is commonly attributed to ethnocentric assumptions about CLD families by teachers from majority cultural backgrounds, and this may be a factor in some situations (Harry, 2008; Wolfe & Duran, 2013). However, we know that many teachers understand the importance of CLD family engagement in their children’s educational programs and work to support it (Trainor, 2010). It is important to acknowledge that effective collaboration can be difficult and complex with the necessary individualization based on each family’s strengths, needs, and experiences. In our view, the persistence of this problem is in part due to how difficult an undertaking this work is, especially with competing demands of the profession in teachers’ daily work. That said, teachers in American public schools are increasingly working with CLD students, many of whom are immigrants or children of immigrant families. Thus, our focus here is to support teachers as they ask, “What can I do to improve my relationships with my students’ families?”

This article offers research-based strategies for teachers who seek to improve their relationships with CLD families who have children served by special education. The guidelines are organized around three guiding questions (see Table 1) intended to scaffold the development of an action plan for improving culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with CLD

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families during the IEP process (see Tables 2 and 3 for examples). Please note, we caution readers against making generalizations about various cultural or linguistic groups because within each “group” there are inevitably nuances and individuals who may adopt or reject norms.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Developing Culturally Responsive Collaborative Partnerships

Guiding Question 1: How Culturally Responsive Am I?

Cultural responsiveness refers to teachers’ self-awareness related to culture and their understanding of and respect for the CLD family’s experiences and background (Turnbull et al., 2011). To bring about change in culturally responsive collaboration, teachers should begin by examining their own cultural beliefs and experiences (Harry, 2008). Then, teachers can identify the culturally responsive habits they practice and how frequently they engage in them. Teachers are the constant in this equation because families, like students, will change each year.

Recommendations for increasing your cultural responsiveness. There may be barriers to collaboration that are outside of teachers’ control. What teachers *can* do is examine their own culturally responsive practices for improvement. Thus, the critical first step is to self-assess and reflect (Siwatu, 2007). The National Center for Cultural Competence provides numerous resources for self-assessment (<http://nccc.georgetown.edu/resources/assessments.html>).

Based on the self-reflection, teachers can become more conscious of the role of culture in their own and others’ lives (Harry, 2008). With increased cultural consciousness, teachers can begin to enact interactions that reflect the concept of *cultural humility*. Cultural humility is an ongoing orientation towards others rather than oneself in which one is able to “overcome the natural tendency to view one’s own beliefs, values, and worldview as superior, and instead be open to the beliefs, values, and worldview of the [CLD parent]” (Hook, Davis, Owen,

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Worthington, & Utsey, 2013, p. 354). In practice, this means avoiding assumptions about a family's motives or capabilities and instead trying to understand their experiences and perspectives. In other words, teachers should withhold snap judgments of CLD families. For example, the parent who has not attended a meeting may need childcare to do so or may need alternative options to a meeting during school hours due to limited ability to miss work. The parent who has not returned any calls or emails may work multiple jobs during second and third shifts. The outcome of this self-reflection should be to identify at least one area of culturally responsive practice for attention and improvement (see Tables 2 and 3 for examples).

Guiding Question 2: Who Is This Family?

The emphasis of this question is being purposeful and proactive in getting to know the family. First, because it is essential to CLD families' engagement, teachers should learn about the family's language preferences and needs. Specifically, teachers should identify the CLD family's native language, dominant language, and primary language spoken at home. Many US teachers assume that most families have one primary language; however, in many countries – and families - multilingualism is the norm (Turnbull et al., 2011). A parent's first language could be an indigenous language of their country of birth (e.g., Canela, in Brazil), but they may be fluent in a dominant language (e.g., Brazilian Portuguese), which may or may not be the language they speak at home (e.g., may also speak some English or Spanish). Understanding the family's proficiency in English is critical. Another consideration to address is whether the family's language use changes with context. For example, some CLD parents may be proficient in English but still prefer interpretation in their native language during IEP meetings due to difficulties understanding technical terms and processing important information related to their children's educational programs (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Wolfe & Duran, 2013).

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Beyond learning about their communication needs, teachers should learn about the individual strengths, needs, and nuances of each particular family just as is done with each individual student (Larocque et al., 2011; Turnbull et al., 2011). This is a broad strategy that can be accomplished many ways, but the critical outcome of this approach is for teachers to demonstrate intentionality in building relationships with CLD families (Harry, 2008). Initially, this means that teachers should show CLD families that they are interested in getting to know and working with them, such as proactively welcoming CLD families to the IEP team, initiating conversations with them, and inviting their participation. Eventually, and within the relationship-building process, teachers should engage in purposeful and individualized efforts to encourage meaningful engagement in IEP meetings by CLD families (Rodriguez, Blatz, & Elbaum, 2014a).

In addition, teachers should learn about the family's expectations for their child with a disability and the reasons underlying their perspectives. CLD families may perceive teachers as unwilling to collaborate if teachers do not ask about and actively listen to their perspectives and goals for their children (Turnbull et al., 2011). For example, Hispanic mothers of transition-aged youth with autism, intellectual disability, or multiple disabilities described experiencing conflicts with teachers when trying to develop meaningful and culturally responsive transition goals (Shogren, 2012). The teachers focused on improving the student's ability to perform functional skills independently, which they viewed as critical for self-determination. However, the families did not view this as an important goal for their children. Rather than discussing the goals and possible concerns with families, the teachers insisted on their goals as written and thought families' opposition was due to low expectations for their children. By assuming the families' motives, they did not realize that the families were actually guided by their cultural valuing of family interdependence over an individual's independence (Shogren, 2012).

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Recommendations for getting to know CLD families. Teachers should schedule short discussions or administer a beginning of the year survey (i.e., home language survey) with CLD families to learn about their language needs and preferences (deFur, 2012; Edwards & Da Fonte, 2012). Many states mandate a home language survey for all incoming students whose family's native language is not English. Some examples are available as models for teachers in districts that do not yet require this². These questions can be asked in conversations with CLD families.

Additionally, teachers should ask families about their preferred meeting times and comfort level with the special education process. This conveys willingness to be flexible and supportive within the collaboration, and helps teachers learn more about families. Based on the CLD family's response, teachers could offer a variety of possible meeting times from which families can choose, as well as work with administrators and/or community agencies to offer special education training (e.g., workshops) to CLD families who need it (Larocque et al., 2011).

When possible, teachers should reach out to someone who can act as a *cultural broker* to learn about general linguistic and cultural practices of the CLD family. A cultural broker is a bilingual, bicultural advocate engaged in the purposeful act of connecting people of differing cultural backgrounds to reduce conflict and improve collaboration (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001). This could be an ESL teacher or a cultural outreach coordinator from the local Parent Training and Information Center. The cultural broker typically acts as a liaison, cultural guide, or mediator, and can provide teachers with advice about interacting with CLD families or facilitate and interpret meetings with CLD families. Over time, teachers themselves can become cultural brokers as they learn more about CLD families' perspectives, experiences, and cultural history.

² Examples of home language surveys: Massachusetts (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/hlsurvey>), Vermont (http://education.vermont.gov/documents/educ_ell_primary_home_language_survey.pdf), and Washington (<http://www.k12.wa.us/MigrantBilingual/pubdocs/HLS/HLSEnglish.pdf>).

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Guiding Question 3: Have We Developed a Collaborative Partnership?

The goal of developing a culturally responsive collaborative partnership with CLD families will manifest as the creation and maintenance of a harmonious environment during the IEP process. Following all of the information gathered in response to the first two questions, teachers should identify whether their IEP meetings more closely resemble Meagan's first or second meeting. Additionally, since collaborative partnerships require more than positive interactions during annual meetings, teachers should analyze the quality and quantity of interactions with CLD families *between* these meetings to examine whether there is a reciprocal relationship and positive rapport with CLD families.

Researchers have identified the dimensions of collaborative partnerships. After decades of studying the school and family dynamics in special education, Ferguson, Hanreddy, and Ferguson (2013) developed a strengths-based collaboration framework. They suggest "that we first seriously listen to families' accounts of their own experiences with both schools and disability" (p.767). The largest study to date described six components of collaborative partnerships: communication, commitment, equality, professional competence, mutual trust; and mutual respect (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). We present the remaining strategies within this structured framework because developing collaborative partnerships requires intentionality (deFur, 2012). These components of collaborative partnerships apply to all families, but the strategies below focus specifically on developing collaborative partnerships with CLD families.

Communication. Parents reported desiring both frequent (quantity) and honest and open (quality) communication (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Some indicators of desired communication included being tactful (e.g., respecting privacy, focusing on the positive in addition to the negatives), avoiding use of jargon, and providing information on resources for children to

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families. Parents have also insisted that communication should be reciprocal, especially emphasizing that educators listen to families (Haines et al., 2015).

Recommendations for communicating with CLD families. First and foremost, CLD families require full language access to participate in conversations and meetings regarding their children's educational programs. Per federal guidance, "schools must communicate information to limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand about any program, service, or activity that is called to the attention of parents who are proficient in English (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). This includes special education and related services, meetings to discuss special education, and parent-teacher conferences. Schools must provide language assistance if CLD families request it. Teachers should work with their teams to ensure that all written materials necessary for participation in IEP meetings are translated into the family's preferred language (Lo, 2012). Specifically, this should include progress reports and evaluation materials at least two days prior to the meeting. It should also include meeting minutes and IEPs within 10 days after meetings.

Teachers should also work with their teams to ensure that a skilled interpreter attends all IEP meetings when the family's native language is not English. The interpreter should be a professional who is trained in the role of interpreter and translator, knowledgeable of special education policy and process, and independent of both the school and the family (Hart, Cheatham, & Jimenez-Silva, 2012; Wolfe & Duran, 2013). Note, some families might speak English as the primary language at home, but still may not be proficient in written English or may be unfamiliar with special education terminology (Larocque et al., 2011). Thus, those who speak English may still require an interpreter. In addition, every ethnic group will also have subgroups that speak a different dialect, and many of these are mutually unintelligible. In other

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words, the dialects are so different that those speaking one or the other can't easily communicate. For example, a common dialect for many Chinese immigrants in the US is Cantonese, which differs from Mandarin, a dialect from northern China chosen by the current central government to be used as the common speech. Families may speak Cantonese, Mandarin, or both, and these distinctions should be known by teachers to appropriately accommodate each CLD family.

There are several strategies we recommend for teachers when there are difficulties providing translations and live interpretation such as when the district does not have resources for a family's particular language (e.g., language may not be prevalent in district³). The general approach is that teachers (and administrators) should seek out resources within their district and community to address these challenges. Some suggestions include:

- First, try to locate materials in your state/district that have already been translated.
- Train bilingual staff in your district/school to be translators and interpreters.
- Consult with nonprofit organizations and community stakeholders to assess how they provide language services and to access their services. For example, *Found in Translation* (<http://www.found-in-translation.org>) is a nonprofit organization in Massachusetts that trains low-income, bilingual women as interpreters.
- Look to local universities for students in language programs training to be translators and interpreters who need to fulfill practicum or clinical hours.
- Utilize telephone interpretation services.

³ It is expected that districts have resources - or a plan to establish resources - for providing translated documents and live interpretation in at least the top 5-10 languages spoken by families in their community. Nationally, the top 10 languages spoken in CLD families' homes include Spanish (71%), Chinese (4%), Vietnamese (3%), French/Haitian Creole (3%), Arabic (2%), Korean (1%), Jewish/Yiddish (1%), Filipino/Tagalog (1%), German (1%), and Hmong (1%) (Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015).

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- Collaborate with other community agencies (e.g., Parent Training and Information Center) that have bilingual staff to help with translations or to identify bilingual community members who may help with translations or be trained as an interpreter.

In addition, companies such as eSTAR™ (<https://www.esped.com>) provide translation services for IEPs. We do not recommend using computer/online translators as they tend to be imperfect.

Beyond translations and live interpretation during meetings, teachers should ask CLD families their preferences for communication between meetings or offer them a variety of options from which they can choose. School-to-home notebooks may not be the most effective tools for communicating with CLD families because of possible misinterpretations due to language proficiency and technical language use (Davern, 2004). Speaking in person may be more effective as it can limit misunderstandings that may occur with written text (Larocque et al., 2011; Lo, 2012). However, some families indicated a preference for written communication due to a relative strength in English grammar and reading compared to spoken communication even though they were proficient in English (Sohn & Wang, 2006).

Commitment. Parents reported that they wanted to see evidence that their children's educators were dedicated to families and children because such a commitment would indicate that they were driven by more than just their job requirements (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Parents wanted educators to convey that they valued and recognized the importance of their relationships with families and thought of them as people rather than as cases. Again, this affirms the important foundation of building relationships with CLD families.

Recommendations for conveying commitment to CLD families. To convey commitment to CLD families, teachers should demonstrate through explicit statements and actions that their focus is on the best interests of the child (Haines et al., 2015). One way to do this is to maintain

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high expectations for the learning potential of the child (Larocque et al., 2011). Another is to regularly communicate the child's progress and other positive experiences to families rather than only problems (Rodriguez, Blatz, & Elbaum, 2014b). Because CLD families, like all families, want their children to be successful, teachers could also advocate on behalf of the family for specific services or types of service delivery appropriate for their child (Resch et al., 2010).

To show commitment to CLD families, teachers can volunteer at or attend local cultural events with the family, or they can visit a local gathering place (e.g., barber shop/hair salon, place of worship, grocery store) for families from the same cultural or linguistic group to learn more about the family's culture (Edwards & Da Fonte, 2012). During IEP meetings, teachers can demonstrate commitment to CLD families by sitting next to rather than across from them (Rodriguez et al., 2014b).

Equality. Parents reported that they valued an overall sense of harmony in meetings and interactions with educators (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). The sense of harmony was manifested by equality in decision-making, acknowledgement of parents' point of view, and encouragement of parents to participate. This component of collaborative partnerships reflects the importance of educators recognizing the strengths and familial expertise of CLD families and supporting them to be fully contributing members of the IEP team (Turnbull et al., 2011).

Recommendations for achieving equality in decision-making with CLD families. Some CLD families may not yet understand the level of family engagement in IEP meetings expected in US schools (Burke, 2013; Trainor, 2010). In order to engage meaningfully, CLD parents must know that they can (and should) and what this entails. Teachers are uniquely positioned to explicitly explain the importance of IEPs and the expectation of family advocacy during the IEP process to families (Larocque et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2014b). We recommend that the

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parents' rights document not only be translated in each family's preferred language, but adapted to be written in everyday language (i.e., no technical language) and at a 5th grade reading level (Lo, 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2014b). Teachers should discuss the document with CLD families.

Teachers should also ensure that CLD families understand the purpose of each meeting and have ample opportunities to contribute to it. As in Meagan's first meeting, one way to do this is to provide a draft of the agenda, including the expected participants' names and titles, and to ask the family what else they want to address in advance of the meeting. Another way to solicit family input prior to the meeting is to conduct a pre-IEP interview focusing on the family's comfort with procedures, their goals, and their concerns (Rodriguez et al., 2014b). Despite best intentions, asking families during the meeting what they want to address may cause anxiety and does not allow them enough time to consider their responses (Rodriguez et al., 2014b).

During the meeting, there are several strategies that promote equality in decision-making. Teachers should write out agenda items being discussed on a large display to help support shared understanding (Lo, 2012). Teachers should also provide written translations of special education terminology and key vocabulary in the family's preferred language (e.g., a glossary), and avoid jargon as much as possible during the meeting (Larocque et al., 2011; Lo, 2014). Teachers can provide visual aids (e.g., examples of the child's work and that of a comparison peer when discussing the child's strengths and needs) to support understanding by CLD families (Larocque et al., 2011). Because interpreters need to translate everything that is said in a meeting, teachers should be sure to allot extra time for the meeting so the team process is not compromised due to being rushed (Hart et al., 2012). Finally, teachers should track whether their meetings were more like the first or the second IEP meeting Meagan attended. To do this, teachers can pay close attention – and collect data, if possible – as to who initiates topics, how long various team

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members speak, and how decisions are made in order to identify opportunities for more equitable and meaningful engagement (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014).

Competence. Parents reported wanting to feel confident in the professional skills of their children's educators' (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). This seems a universal expectation, but within special education it meant parents expected to see clear evidence of individualization based on the unique needs of their children. They also expected teachers to keep up to date with research-based practices and technology in the field, especially when beneficial to their children.

Recommendations for demonstrating competence to CLD families. Regarding individualization of special education services, CLD families have reported wanting teachers to (a) avoid taking a deficit view of disability, and (b) understand the child's language needs (Wolfe & Duran, 2013). Thus, teachers should incorporate student strengths into instruction and discuss these with families rather than focusing only on the disability label or the student's deficits (Haines et al., 2015). Teachers should also develop a language profile for the student to understand and accommodate his or her language needs (Wolfe & Duran, 2013). Some of this information (i.e., the student's native language, dominant language, and primary language spoken at home) may come from the home language survey. The language profile should also include whether the student can follow instructions in English.

To demonstrate competence regarding research-based practices, teachers should explicitly explain instructional methods to families and clearly describe how services specifically meet students' needs rather than just presenting service options without any context (Rodriguez et al., 2014b). Doing so conveys not only individualization of services but also the teacher's understanding of special education instruction and policy. In fact, when teachers implement appropriate services and report student progress regularly, they may not have as many

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interactions with CLD families because they will be viewed as professionally competent by families (Rodriguez et al., 2014a).

Trust. Parents reported that they desired mutual trust with their children's educators, and they indicated three components of this trust: a) reliability of educators, b) assurance that the child was treated with dignity and was safe from physical or emotional harm, and c) discretion when dealing with confidential and personal information (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

Recommendations for achieving mutual trust with CLD families. Extant research indicates that frequent communication and sharing resources with families is critical for developing trust in collaborative partnerships (Resch et al., 2010; Wolfe & Duran, 2013). Communication between teachers and CLD families may be enhanced when there is one teacher (usually the special education teacher or case manager) assigned as the contact person for each family (Rodriguez et al., 2014b). One invaluable resource to share with CLD families is the local Parent Training and Information Center (PTI)⁴. At the PTI, CLD families can attend workshops on special education policy and practice, learn about their rights, and participate in support groups with other families with a range of knowledge and experience to share with them (Burke, 2013). Regarding reliability and accountability, teachers should ensure that they follow through in a timely manner with implementing services and completing tasks that were agreed upon during IEP meetings (Rodriguez et al., 2014a; Wolfe & Duran, 2013).

Respect. Ultimately, collaborative partnerships with CLD families are rooted in mutual respect during the IEP process (Haines et al., 2015). Parents indicated two components of this respect: a) that educators valued the child as a person rather than as a disability label, and b) that

⁴ Every state has at least one PTI. Information on each state's PTI can be found here: <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center>.

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educators engaged in simple courtesy (e.g., being on time, acknowledging parents' efforts) with them during the IEP process (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

Recommendations for achieving mutual respect with CLD families. As stated above (in the Competence section), teachers should move beyond the disability label to get to know each student as a unique individual and a person first. This is particularly true for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities who do not speak because they are often at risk of being misinterpreted as incompetent, especially if they do not use a mode of augmentative alternative communication (AAC; Calculator, 2009). Teachers should work on their teams to ensure that all students served by special education who do not speak, especially those with the most significant needs, have access to AAC that supports them to participate as much as possible in the general education curriculum (Calculator, 2009).

Regarding respectful interactions with CLD families, teachers should certainly make every effort to be on time to IEP meetings, to let families know as early as possible if they need to reschedule a meeting, and especially, to value family contributions in IEP meetings (Harry, 2008). Because many CLD families report feeling marginalized when teachers disregard familial expertise and value their own professional knowledge over familial knowledge, teachers should proactively support and validate family contributions in IEP meetings (Wolfe & Duran, 2013). When unanticipated situations arise during busy work days that result in being late or stressed, teachers should consider explaining this to families to avoid the tardiness or stress being interpreted as a sign of disrespect by CLD families (Wolfe & Duran, 2013).

Teacher Action Plans for Developing Collaborative Partnerships with CLDS Families

Despite widespread awareness of the importance of CLD family engagement in special education, the lack of culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with CLD families has

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persisted as a problem. It is critical for teachers to systematically enact purposeful and individualized strategies to address this problem with their CLD families. Teachers should formally identify areas of need and specific action steps related to each of the guiding questions. Because it is not realistic to expect to solve this problem immediately, we recommend that teachers start by choosing one strategy that addresses at least one of the purposes for each guiding question. See Tables 2 and 3 for examples of individualized teacher action plans for developing culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with CLD families.

[Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here]

Conclusion

Despite its successes in achieving compulsory public education for eligible students with disabilities, IDEIA 2004 is implemented by a bureaucratic system that demands parents become advocates for their individual children through negotiations reliant upon on social and cultural capital (Ong-Dean, 2009; Sauer & Albanesi, 2013; Trainor, 2010). What this means is that the parents who have the capital to advocate this way typically get what they want for their children. CLD families may be hesitant or unable to advocate this way, and their strengths and willingness to participate may be misinterpreted by school professionals because of lack of cultural competence or may be disregarded due to hierarchical power relations in which professional expertise is valued over familial expertise (Harry, 2008; Olivos et al., 2010). Adhering to these guiding questions for developing culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with CLD families can help to bridge this critical gap in the IEP process and bring about important positive outcomes for the children we serve and their families.

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DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Table 1.

Guiding Questions for Developing Collaborative Partnerships with CLD Families

Guiding Question	Purpose
1. How culturally responsive am I?	<p>Self-reflect on cultural beliefs and experiences</p> <p>Develop/increase cultural consciousness</p> <p>Identify areas of improvement in culturally responsive practices</p>
2. Who is this family?	<p>Gain knowledge about the family's language and culture</p> <p>Learn about the family's perceptions of disability and goals for their child</p> <p>Convey to the family that you want to get to know them</p>
<p>3. Have we developed a collaborative partnership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Communication b. Commitment c. Equality d. Professional competence e. Mutual trust f. Mutual respect 	<p>Assess current relationship and quality of IEP meetings with the family</p> <p>Identify areas of improvement in culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with the family</p> <p>Enact practices promoting culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with the family during the IEP process (i.e., IEP meetings <i>and</i> interactions between IEP meetings)</p>

DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Table 2.

Teacher Action Plan for Developing Collaborative Partnerships with CLD Families- Example 1

Guiding Question	Purpose	Example
4. How culturally responsive am I?	<p>Self-reflect on cultural beliefs and experiences</p> <p>Identify areas of improvement in culturally responsive practices</p>	I took the Georgetown survey ⁵ and noticed I was hesitant about answering some questions. Upon reflection, I think I could improve my understanding about various cultures. In particular, I could focus on improving my communication with Robbie's family.
5. Who is this family?	<p>Gain knowledge about the family's language and culture</p> <p>Convey to the family that you want to get to know them</p>	<p>In the home language survey I learned that while Robbie's family understands English and watch some television in English, the parents speak Cantonese at home with each other.</p> <p>I plan to attend a local Tet New Year celebration. I will also read about the historical relationship between Vietnam and China.</p>
6. Have we developed a collaborative partnership?	<p>Assess current relationship and quality of IEP meetings with the family</p> <p>Enact practices promoting culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with the family during the IEP process (i.e., IEP meetings <i>and</i> interactions between IEP meetings)</p>	<p>I found out from a colleague that translated materials and live language interpretation were not provided at Robbie's IEP meetings last year.</p> <p>I will find out from our local Chinese cultural broker how to organize a Cantonese interpreter for the next IEP meeting. I will ask that the invitation, parents' rights document, and the assessment results be translated into Cantonese one week prior to our IEP meeting.</p>

⁵There are several resources on the Georgetown site for promoting cultural diversity and cultural competency. This one is the Self-assessment Checklist for Personnel Providing Services and Supports to Children with Disabilities & Special Health Needs and their Families. Available at <http://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/ChecklistCSHN.pdf>

⁶ Robbie is the American name this Southeast Asian family gave to their son to "make it easier for the teachers to pronounce." His given name is Bingwen.

DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Table 3.

Teacher Action Plan for Developing Collaborative Partnerships with CLD Families- Example 2

Guiding Question	Purpose	Example
1. How culturally responsive am I?	<p>Self-reflect on cultural beliefs and experiences</p> <p>Identify areas of improvement in culturally responsive practices</p>	<p>I took the Georgetown survey and noticed I could improve by attending to our classroom's physical environment, materials, and resources to be more representative of my student from India. I will also try to incorporate some of the family's cultural values into classroom routines.</p>
2. Who is this family?	<p>Gain knowledge about the family's language and culture</p> <p>Convey to the family that you want to get to know them</p>	<p>I examined a Language map of India⁷ and learned that although Hindi is the official national language, there are many other distinct languages of India.</p> <p>My student Chanda's name means "moon" in Sanskrit. I found out from an informal interest inventory that Chanda dances in the North Indian tradition.</p> <p>I plan to watch videos about this form of dance and ask her family if I could be invited to attend one of her performances.</p>
3. Have we developed a collaborative partnership?	<p>Assess current relationship and quality of IEP meetings with the family</p> <p>Enact practices promoting culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with the family during the IEP process (i.e., IEP meetings and interactions between IEP meetings)</p>	<p>During my historical review of Chanda's IEP, I learned that the family stopped speaking Hindi at home when Chanda was young because they thought it was interfering with her English language development. Recently, Chanda and her siblings began tutoring in Hindi. I plan to ask the SLP and the family how I might support Chanda's bilingual language development.</p>

⁷ My Indian cultural broker suggested <http://www.mapsofindia.com/culture/indian-languages.html> and the International Linguistics Community provides a free online resource that illustrates the languages and dialects of countries around the world at <http://linguistlist.org/forms/langs/get-language-by-country.cfm?country=23>

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