Developing Collaborative Partnerships With Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families During the IEP Process

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Meagan, an undergraduate teacher candidate 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 had been contacted by a cultural outreach coordinator from the local urban Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) for someone who could “simply take notes” for the family; the district had already scheduled an interpreter. Meagan later told her professor that the meeting seemed well organized and conducive to what she had learned in class as illustrative of effective collaboration. Meagan reported that 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 from the school beforehand. During the meeting, the parents 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. This meeting also involved an immigrant family; the parents spoke little and they relied heavily on having an interpreter. But there had been miscommunication about the language needed; the interpreter could speak Cantonese and Mandarin but the family’s home language was Vietnamese. The mother could understand Cantonese so the interpreter used it, but that excluded the father, who could not understand Cantonese. There was a district-appointed advocate for the family, and Meagan later 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 parents appeared discouraged because their concerns were not addressed before the school personnel indicated the meeting time was up and the teachers had to return to their classrooms. Although the parents had requested the forms be translated into their native Vietnamese and sent to them, the school personnel said they did not have the resources to comply. Meagan wondered, “How could these two IEP meetings be so different?”

Unfortunately, many teachers might have experiences more like Meagan’s second IEP meeting than her first. Although there has been a consistent vision for multicultural education and family collaboration in teacher preparation programs for decades, collaborative partnerships between culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families and their children’s educators remain elusive (Harry, 2008; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008). (Following Wolfe and Duran, 2013, we define CLD families in the United States as those whose primary language is not English or who are not European American. We also use family to include a guardian or extended family member who represents the student as part of the IEP.)

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 disconnect 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 Act (IDEA, 2006). In fact, IDEA emphasizes family engagement in children’s education as a crucial element in improving the effectiveness of special education programs (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2011). Indeed, family 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).

The difficulties experienced while interacting with the special education system can be even more prevalent for CLD families because they do not typically experience collaborative partnerships with their children’s school professionals (Fults & Harry, 2012; Harry, 2008; Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010). Schools often present several barriers to collaboration with CLD families, including a lack of cultural responsiveness, inappropriate accommodations related to language, insufficient information about team meetings, little respect for familial expertise and contributions, and 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,
even as today’s public schools continue to become more diverse, the majority of preservice teachers are still from White, middle-class backgrounds; this dynamic 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) explained, “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, many teachers understand the importance of CLD family engagement in 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 the 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 plan for improving culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with CLD families during the IEP process (see Tables 2 and 3 for examples). 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.

**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. Focus here is to support teachers as they ask, “What can I do to improve my relationships with my students’ families?”

In this article, we offer 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 families during the IEP process (see Tables 2 and 3 for examples). 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.

**To bring about change in culturally responsive collaboration, teachers should begin by examining their own cultural beliefs and experiences.**

### Table 1. Guiding Questions for Developing Collaborative Partnerships With CLD Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding question</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How culturally responsive am I?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Who is this family?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Have we developed a collaborative partnership?</strong></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="Table content" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>- Self-reflect on cultural beliefs and experiences.</td>
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<td>Commitment</td>
<td>- Develop or increase cultural consciousness.</td>
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<td>Equality</td>
<td>- Identify areas of improvement in culturally responsive practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional competence</td>
<td>- Gain knowledge about the family’s language and culture.</td>
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<td>Mutual trust</td>
<td>- Learn about the family’s perceptions of disability and goals for the</td>
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<td>Mutual respect</td>
<td>- Convey to the family members that you want to get to know them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mutual trust</td>
<td>- Assess current relationship and quality of IEP meetings with the</td>
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<td>Mutual respect</td>
<td>- Identify areas of improvement in culturally responsive collaborative</td>
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*Note*. CLD = culturally and linguistically diverse; IEP = individualized education program.
equation because families, like students, will change each year. There may be barriers to collaboration that are outside of a teacher’s control. What teachers can do is examine their own culturally responsive practices for improvement. Thus, the essential first step is to self-assess and reflect (Siwatu, 2007). The National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University (n.d.) provides numerous resources for self-assessment.

On the basis of 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 toward 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, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013, p. 354). In practice, this means avoiding assumptions about a family’s motives or capabilities and instead trying to understand the family’s 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 child care 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 e-mails 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.

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,
Specifically, teachers should identify the CLD family’s native language, dominant language, and the primary language spoken at home. Many U.S. 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 his or her country of birth (e.g., Canela in Brazil), but the parent may be fluent in a dominant language (e.g., Brazilian Portuguese), which may or may not be the language he or she speaks at home (e.g., the parent may also speak some English or Spanish). Understanding the family’s proficiency in English is also important. 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).

Beyond learning about families’ 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

| Table 3. Action Plan for Developing Collaborative Partnerships With CLD Families: Example 2 |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Guiding question | Purpose | Example |
| How culturally responsive am I? | • Self-reflect on cultural beliefs and experiences. | I took the Georgetown surveya 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. |
| Who is this family? | • Gain knowledge about the family’s language and culture. | I examined a language map of Indiab and learned that although Hindi is the official national language, there are many other distinct languages of India. 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. 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. |
| Have we developed a collaborative partnership? | • Assess current relationship and quality of IEP meetings with the family. | 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. |

Note. CLD = culturally and linguistically diverse; IEP = individualized education program; SLP = speech language pathologist.

aThere are several resources on the Georgetown University website for promoting cultural diversity and cultural competency, including the Self-Assessment Checklist (Goode, 2004) referenced in this example. bSee Maps of India (http://www.mapsofindia.com/culture/indian-languages.html), and the International Linguistics Community website, The Linguist List (http://linguistlist.org/forms/langs/get-language-by-country.cfm?country = 23).
broad strategy that can be accomplished in many ways, but the 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 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 the child with a disability and the reasons underlying these 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 spectrum disorder, 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 essential for self-determination. However, the families did not view this as an important goal for their children. Rather than discussing this 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).

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 Fonse, 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 this (e.g., Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2011; Vermont Agency of Education, 2014; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2014.) These questions can be asked in conversations with CLD families.

In addition, 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 family’s response, teachers could offer a variety of possible meeting times from which families could choose, as well as work with administrators 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 English as a Second Language teacher or a cultural outreach coordinator from the local PTI. 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.

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. Based on all of the information gathered in response to the first two questions, teachers will be able to identify whether their IEP meetings more closely resemble Meagan’s first or second meeting.

Teachers should analyze the quality and quantity of interactions with CLD families between meetings to examine whether there is a reciprocal relationship and positive rapport with CLD families.

Because 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, suggesting “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: (a) communication, (b) commitment, (c) equality, (d) professional competence, (e) mutual trust, and (f) 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 focus specifically on developing collaborative partnerships with CLD families.

Communication

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

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, these should include progress reports and evaluation materials at least 2 days prior to the meeting, and meeting minutes and IEPs within 10 days following 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). Although some families might speak English as the primary language at home they 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, within ethnic groups there can be subgroups that speak different dialects, and many of these are mutually unintelligible. In other words, the dialects are so different that those speaking one or the other cannot easily communicate. For example, a common dialect for many Chinese immigrants in the United States is Cantonese, which differs from Mandarin, a dialect from northern China chosen by the current central government to be used as the common language. 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 district). Districts should have resources—or a plan to establish resources—for providing translated documents and live interpretation in at least the top five to 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 or Haitian Creole (3%), Arabic (2%), Korean (1%), Hebrew or Yiddish (1%), Filipino or Tagalog (1%), German (1%), and Hmong (1%) (Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015). The general approach is that teachers (and administrators) should seek out resources within their district and community to address these challenges. Some suggestions include the following:

- First, try to locate materials in your state or district that have already been translated.
- Train bilingual staff in your district or 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.
- Collaborate with other community agencies (e.g., PTI) 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 or 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 may have a preference for written communication due to a relative strength in English grammar and reading compared to spoken communication even though they may be proficient in English (Sohn & Wang, 2006).

Commitment

Parents have reported that they want to see evidence that their children’s educators are dedicated to families and children because such a commitment would indicate that they are driven by more than just their job requirements (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Educators should convey that they value and recognize the importance of their relationships with families and think of them as people rather than as cases. Again, this helps build relationships with 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 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., barbershop or 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 have reported that they value an overall sense of harmony in meetings and interactions with educators (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). A sense of harmony can be 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 that educators recognize the strengths and familial expertise of CLD families and support them to be fully contributing members of the IEP team (Turnbull et al., 2011).

Some CLD families may not yet understand the level of family engagement in IEP meetings expected in U.S. schools (Burke, 2013; Trainor, 2010). In order to engage meaningfully, CLD members 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 members’ 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) as well as 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 by time constraints (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 members speak, and how decisions are made in order to identify opportunities for

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more equitable and meaningful engagement (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014).

Competence

Parents want 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.

CLD families have reported wanting teachers to avoid taking a deficit view of disability and to 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 at 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 interactions with CLD families because they will be viewed as professionally competent by families (Rodriguez, Blatz, & Elbaum, 2014a).

Trust

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

Extant research indicates that frequent communication and sharing of resources with families is crucial 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 PTI. (Every state has at least one PTI; see http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center). 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 who have 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 communication (AAC; Calculator, 2009). Teachers should work to ensure that all students served by special education who do not speak, especially those with the most significant needs, have access to AAC so that they can 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 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 workdays 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 (Wolfe & Duran, 2013).

**Developing Collaborative Partnerships With CLD 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 persisted as a problem. It is essential 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.

**Conclusion**

Despite its successes in achieving compulsory public education for eligible students with disabilities, IDEA is implemented by a bureaucratic system that demands parents become advocates for their individual children through negotiations reliant upon 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, 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 our guiding questions for developing culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with CLD families can help to bridge this gap in the IEP process and bring about important positive outcomes for these children and their families.

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