

Preparing Educators for Developing Culturally and Linguistically Responsive IEPs

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Abstract

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the cornerstone for documenting the appropriate education being provided to students who qualify for special education and related services under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act. A growing group of students with a disability are students who are culturally and linguistically diverse and addressing the particular needs of this group is essential. This research to practice article examines key issues related to how teachers are prepared to develop culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) IEPs. Reviews of recent research and literature indicate the need for increased attention in the development of CLR IEPs for diverse learners, with specific implications for contemporary educator preparation.

Keywords

Individualized Education Program, cultural/linguistic diversity (CLD), teacher preparation policy/service delivery, teacher knowledge

Diversity in general and special education classrooms continues to evolve especially when considering the significant increases in the numbers of English learners (ELs) in today's schools. The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) reported that, in the past decade, the number of students who are at various stages of English acquisition had increased by more than 300,000. Moreover, the number of ELs identified as having a disability continues to grow (Lo, 2013). Watkins and Liu (2013) suggested that the number of ELs with an identified disability grows at a rate of approximately 150,000 every 5 years. Although Spanish remains the predominant first language, complicating the challenge faced by schools is the fact that the EL population includes students who speak more than 400 different languages (Watkins & Liu, 2013).

Once a student is determined to be eligible for special education/related services, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act

(IDEA) of 2004 mandates that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) describing needed services be developed. The driving force associated with this law, as refined in the recent Supreme Court case, *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017), is to ensure that a student receives an appropriate education that is more than minimum benefit. A meaningful IEP is the cornerstone of delivering appropriate education and should be seen as an instructional tool that documents services that go beyond meeting minimum compliance standards under the law.

The current version of IDEA, like its predecessors, clearly identifies certain required

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components of the IEP (e.g., present levels, annual goals, supplemental services/aids, accommodations). However, the regulations issued by the government that accompany the actual federal statute do not now, nor have they ever, specifically defined how actually to write a meaningful and quality IEP. This reality has been and continues to remain a challenge for educators and parents, as the quality of well-written IEPs remains elusive (Hoover & Patton, 2017). Moreover, as increased numbers of students who come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds qualify for special education services, the need for culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) IEPs becomes critical.

An IEP is considered CLR when it values and incorporates diverse learner qualities and strengths into the development and implementation of needed services (Hoover & Patton, 2017). These qualities and strengths are the foundation that drives the teacher's instructional method and content for the culturally and linguistically diverse student. Unfortunately, very little attention has been dedicated to the development of CLR IEPs and very little research has been directed at examining this topic. For example, in their pilot project review of literature, (Hoover, Erickson, Patton, Sacco, & Tran, in press-a) found few studies that directly addressed IEPs for diverse learners. Through their pilot project, they examined 29 IEPs of ELs classified as having a learning disability in two school districts. The most notable finding was that almost none of the IEPs contained CLR features to inform teachers on how to best educate culturally and linguistically diverse students with a learning disability, thus jeopardizing the provision of an appropriate education. Specifically, "IEPs clearly lack attention to cultural and linguistic diverse features, qualities, and strengths that teachers must understand to provide ELs with a learning disability effective special education" (Hoover et al., in press-a).

Given the increase in the number of ELs in special education, a crucial need exists for special education preparation and professional development programs to provide spe-

cific guidance to teachers in the development of CLR IEPs. The overall purposes of this article are threefold. First, key features of a CLR IEP are defined and illustrated. Second, a discussion of how to develop effective IEPs is addressed in preservice teacher training and in-service professional development is provided. Third, a set of recommendations for assuring that culture and linguistic features are considered and incorporated in the development of IEPs for diverse students with disabilities is offered.

What Are the Features of a CLR IEP?

Since the initial implementation of IDEA in 1975, as P.L. 94-142, the IEP has been used as the primary educational document to inform families, educators, and students about necessary services and instructional approaches for those learners found eligible for special education services. In this section, the key components of an IEP and the features that make an IEP CLR are described.

According to IDEA, every IEP must evaluate, collect data, and consider seven key components to meet minimum compliance; present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP), measurable annual goals, supplemental aids/services, accommodations and/or modifications, transition (starting at age 14), behavioral intervention plans, and assistive technology and services. Of the required IEP components, the PLAAFP, measurable annual goals, supplemental aids/services, and accommodations and/or modifications must be well developed to ensure the delivery of effective teaching and learning to a student with a disability in educational environments with his or her age and grade level peers. The IEP should include an accurate account of the student's current academic and functional skill sets and performance levels at the time the IEP was created. In addition, a measurable annual goal for any number of skills on which a student shows difficulty and for which present levels of performance exist should be generated.

In addition, the supplemental aids/services and accommodations and/or modifications specify various techniques and resources that have been determined as necessary for the student to meet his or her goal(s). Furthermore, starting at the age of 14 or 16 (depending on which state a student lives), the transition component becomes a required feature of the IEP to aid students in the transition from school to life after secondary school. Special factors such as behavior intervention plans and assistive technology need to be considered for all students with a disability; however, not all students will require these services.

The development and implementation of the IEP for a culturally and/or linguistically diverse learner must be responsive to the student's curricular needs by capturing the cultural and linguistic features and skills that a student brings to the classroom (Hoover & Patton, 2017). To best accomplish this, educators must have a working knowledge of cultural and linguistic responsive principles and practices when collecting data, evaluating the student's skills, and planning instruction. CLR instructional practices should be included in the IEP to provide sufficient opportunities for diverse learners to function in the general education classroom (Hoover & Patton, 2017). Table 1, adapted from Hoover and Patton (2017), shows important CLR considerations that are associated with each of the key components and special factors required in an IEP.

English language proficiency level is one of the "special factors" that must be considered for each student who qualifies for special education services. IDEA states that "Depending on the needs of the child, the IEP team needs to consider what the law calls special factors. These include: . . . If the child has limited proficiency of English, the IEP team will consider the child's language needs as these needs related to his or her IEP. . . ." [§300.324(A)(2)(ii)]. Unfortunately, as can be gleaned from this wording, where these considerations should be addressed in the IEP remains ambiguous.

A variety of qualities, as shown in Table 1, combine to shape a CLR IEP for diverse learn-

ers with a disability. To further illustrate features of a CLR IEP consider the following IEP example for a fourth-grade student (Lola) who has a learning disability and who has goals in reading and math, as depicted in Table 2. Although Lola's full IEP actually contains more information, consisting of additional components, this example will focus on selected required components: PLAAFP, measurable annual goals, accommodations, and needed special education and related services. Bolded content in Table 2 highlights cultural and linguistic responsive considerations specific to Lola's second language acquisition level—within the context of her academic needs in the areas of reading and math. Note some of the listed accommodations on the IEP would be beneficial to many students who are struggling for various reasons; however, they have critical linguistic relevance for this student.

Current Practices Preparing Special Educators in the Development of IEPs

The profession of special education recognizes that teachers need to demonstrate a set of competencies to be effective within different roles while fulfilling various duties in the delivery of appropriate education to students with special needs. Although the knowledge and skill sets associated with being a competent special educator have changed over time (Hoover & Patton, 2008; Morsink, 1982), the skill of writing meaningful IEPs has been required since the passage of IDEA. Currently, the ability to generate CLR IEPs has become more pronounced (Hoover & Patton, 2017), which has major implications for contemporary special education preservice training and professional development. Determining the extent to which special educators are prepared to develop IEPs includes examination of at minimum four features (a) professional organization standards, (b) professional resources, (c) preservice training coursework, and (d) professional development. Each of these aspects is discussed below

Table 1. Required IEP Components and Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Considerations.

Required IEP components	Culturally and linguistically responsive considerations
PLAAFP	Multiple factors that include . . . Personal interests English proficiency level and measure Home cultural influences and teachings Supports in and out of the classroom
Measurable annual goals	Mostly focused in the conditions section of the goal, considerations include . . . Cultural funds of knowledge Accessibility to content and resources English proficiency level
Supplementary aids/services	Factors to consider . . . Translation of documents and use of interpreters in meetings English and/or home language proficiency level and measure Home cultural influences and teachings
Accommodations and/or modifications	Focused mostly on how students access the content consider . . . Cultural values and teachings English and native proficiency level Most proficient language for instruction Resources that promote accessibility
Transition	Future planning is based on . . . Cultural and family values Family and/or community participation Personal preferences, interests, and strengths
Behavioral intervention plans	Considerations are sensitive to . . . Cultural values and dynamic structures Family situation Perceptions of behavior
Assistive technology and services	Promotes accessibility to content in the classroom Accessibility/resources Exposure and experiences to devices Training

Note. IEP = Individualized Education Program; PLAAFP = Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance.

with particular attention to IEP development training.

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Educator Standards

The CEC, 2015, the major professional organization for the field of special education, has compiled an extensive set of standards that define the competencies of a professional special education teacher. The CEC preparation standards capture two general knowledge/skills sets: (a) *initial common specialty items*—“essential knowledge and skills that beginning special education professionals

must possess to be ready to begin their practice” (p. 35); and (b) *advanced specialty items*—“areas in which special education professionals develop and deepen their skills and broaden their knowledge base” (p. 91).

Woven throughout these essential competency areas are knowledge and skill sets that relate to learners’ cultural and linguistic qualities. In fact, 29% of the “knowledge” and 11% of the “skills” items within the *initial common specialty items* set directly address (i.e., mention) cultural and linguistic topics. However, the only competency item related to the development of IEPs is found in the *advanced specialty items* set (ACSI.3.K5: Process of

Table 2. Culturally and Linguistically Responsive IEP Example.

Name: Lola Bo		Grade: 4
Language of Parent/ Guardian: Burmese and English		
Background: Family recently moved to the United States		
Primary Exceptionality: Specific Learning Disability		
PLAAFP for reading:		
Lola, who is a second language learner, is at the Developing level (level 3) of the English proficiency based on the WIDA ACCESS Language Proficiency. She reads at a level M based on Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment and reading comprehension is at 80% accuracy with independent reading level texts. The family reports Lola reads children’s books at home in Burmese to her siblings, but the language proficiency level is unknown. Lola works best when she is given extended time to look through the comprehension questions before and after reading the text in order to have the opportunity to process the content.		
Measurable Annual Goal for reading:		
By February 2017, Lola will increase reading level to Q and reading comprehension to 90% accuracy when given ample time to look through the comprehension questions before and after reading the text.		
PLAAFP for math:		
Lola is able to complete single and double-digit addition and subtraction computations in Burmese as well as English with ease. She completes multiplication and division computation problems in English 18 out of 20, 90% accuracy. Lola struggles with word problems with multi-step (4+) operation problems, she completes 10 out of 20, 50% accuracy. Due to Lola’s English language proficiency level, she utilizes the use of a student-friendly glossary and formula sheet when completing word problems and is given ample time to break down the content.		
Measurable Annual Goal for math:		
By February 2017, will complete word problems with multi-step (4+) step operations, 17 out of 20, 85% accuracy with the use of a student-friendly glossary and formula sheet.		
Accommodations: [NOTE: Some of the accommodations noted below are beneficial to many students who are struggling; they have linguistic relevance for this student.]		
Extended time	Frequent breaks	
Chunk assignments into smaller sections	Visual aids	
Read aloud (except when reading is the focus of assessment)	Formula sheet	
Student-friendly glossary for reading and math	Response approximations when reading content is new to the learner to reduce anxiety	
Special Education and Related Services:		
Lola will receive 30 min, 5 days per week of direct special education instruction in the resource classroom for reading and 30 min, 5 days per week of special education support within the general education classroom for reading. Lola will also receive English as second language (ESL) instruction with the English language development teacher daily. The special education teacher and English language development teacher will collaborate monthly to monitor Lola’s progress and discuss how best to provide support to her.		

Note. IEP = Individualized Education Program; PLAAFP = Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance.

developing an IEP). Most relevant to the purpose of this article is the fact that nowhere in any of the competencies is there direct mention of developing CLR IEPs. Given the increased diversity of learners in special education seen in today’s schools, educator preparation of beginning and experienced special educators should explicitly teach skills to

generate CLR IEPs to properly apply the CEC cultural and linguistic competencies.

Professional Literature and Resources

In addition to examining professional standards, another way to determine how much

Table 3. Analysis of Professional Books About Writing IEPs.

Author	Title	TOC entry	Index	Index listing	Content coverage	Explicit instruction
Bateman (2007)	<i>From Gobbledygook to Clearly Written Annual IEP Goals</i>	N	N		(N)	N
Bateman and Herr (2006)	<i>Writing Measurable IEP Goals and Objectives</i>	N	N		N	
Gibb and Dyches (2016)	<i>IEPs: Writing Quality IEPs (3 ed.)</i>	N	N		(N)	N
Martin (2005)	<i>A guide to collaboration for IEP teams</i>	N	Y	N	N	
Martin (2010)	<i>Supporting the IEP Process: A Facilitator's Guide</i>	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Pierangelo and Giuliani (2007)	<i>A Step-By-Step Guide for Educators: Understanding, developing, and writing effective IEPs</i>	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Richard and Veale (2009)	<i>The Autism Spectrum Disorders IEP Companion</i>	N	N		N	
Siegel (2017)	<i>The Complete IEP Guide: How to Advocate for Your Special Education Child (9 ed.)</i>	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Thoma and Wehman (2010)	<i>Getting the Most Out of IEPs: An Educator's Guide to the Student-Directed Approach</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Twachtman-Cullen and Twachtman-Cullen (2011)	<i>The IEP from A to Z: How to Create Meaningful and Measurable Goals and Objectives</i>	N	Y	N	N	
Wilson, Lanza, and Evans (2005)	<i>The SLP's IEP Companion</i>	N	N		N	
Winterman and Rosas (2014)	<i>The IEP Checklist: Your Guide to Creating Meaningful and Compliant IEPs</i>	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Wright, Wright, and O'Connor (2010)	<i>All about IEPs: Answers To Frequently Asked Questions about IEPs</i>	N	Y	N		

Note. IEP = Individualized Education Program; TOC = Table of Contents.

attention is dedicated to the topic of CLR IEPs is to examine professional books about IEP development. Over the years, many books have been written about how to write IEPs. Although most books discuss the mandated components of properly developed IEPs, very few (see Gibb & Dyches, 2016) provide detailed information and specific guidelines on how to write quality IEPs. Nevertheless, many of these books have been or are currently being used in coursework for preparing special education teachers to write IEPs. Therefore, it is instructive to examine whether CLR issues are discussed at some length in these professional books, given the number of

diverse students who are being served in special education in schools today.

Table 3 provides the results of a cursory examination of books that have been published in recent years about writing IEPs. As can be seen, in general, very little attention is given to writing CLR IEPs. Of the 13 books examined, only two books had a culture-related listing in the table of contents. Nine of the books included an index, with only six having an entry related to cultural/linguistic responsiveness (e.g., multicultural families; IEP requirements). These findings, although informal, highlight an overall lack of attention in professional IEP books to considerations of culture and language that is mandated

by IDEA when developing IEPs for students who represent diverse cultures and backgrounds and/or second language acquisition.

Authors who have addressed cultural and language within the context of special education frequently concentrate on topics such as the referral and assessment processes (e.g., Hoover & Erickson, 2015; Hoover, Erickson, Herron, & Smith, in press-b; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Ortiz, Robertson Wilkinson, Liu, McGhee, & Kushner, 2011), transition (Greene, 2011; Patton & Trainor, 2008; Trainor, 2017; Trainor, Murray, & Kim, 2016), and family involvement (Harry & Klingner, 2006). Often, these topics begin with the prereferral and referral process to ensure that appropriate strategies are used to determine that student knowledge and language proficiency skills are properly assessed to differentiate between English language acquisition and learning disabilities (Klingner, Artiles, & Barletta, 2006). However, one new resource (Hoover & Patton, 2017) directly focuses on the development of CLR IEPs.

Other professionals have looked at improving the ways in which educators facilitate engagement with families of diverse learners by attending to cultural diversity, funds of knowledge and community resources, or first or second language acquisition (Pang, 2011; Zhang & Bennett, 2013). Additional attention has been directed to use of needed interpreter and/or translation services for families to best engage them in the IEP process and inform them of their legal rights regarding the student's needs, services, and strengths (Hart, Cheatham, Jimenez-Suarz, 2012). The topic of culturally responsive transition planning has also received the specific attention of certain professionals (Patton & Trainor, 2008; Trainor et al., 2016). These and related factors are important to note as they influence the compilation of the IEP and delivery of services to diverse learners and their families.

Preservice Courses Related to IEP Development

Special education training programs at institutions of higher education (IHE), especially at the undergraduate, introduce the concepts underlying and the skills necessary for devel-

oping IEPs. Most “knowledge” and “skills” sets for developing IEPs are covered in various courses that comprise a program of study. In most teacher training institutions, general education teachers are also introduced to IEPs as both participants (i.e., contributors at IEP meetings) and consumers (i.e., using a completed IEP to guide instruction and manage behavior in their classrooms). IEP topics are covered in different ways across training programs. Typically, one course stands out as the primary vehicle for covering IEPs in some depth; however, IEP topics are or should be covered in a variety of courses such as special education methods, assessment, behavior management, collaboration, and transition. Furthermore, fieldwork and student teaching experiences provide “hands-on” opportunities for teachers-in-training to examine and participate in the development of IEPs. A major assumption is often made by teacher educators that all aspects of IEP development and implementation come together toward the end of the program of study so that the soon-to-be special education teacher has the competencies to generate IEPs that are appropriate for a wide range of diverse students.

In regard to the topic of IEPs for diverse learners with disabilities, the extent and range of coverage of cultural and linguistic issues within an educator preparation program is often difficult to determine from a course title, syllabus, or schedule of topics covered in a course. Based on a review of literature, to date, a comprehensive study of course content related to CLR IEPs has not been undertaken, which makes it difficult to determine level of adequate preparation provided to classroom teachers concerning IEPs for ELs. However, based on an informal review of information provided through various university websites describing undergraduate programs of study in special education, Tran (2017) found that IEP coverage varies across institutions. It was also determined that examining course information available on department websites provides little insight into how IEP topics are covered at a specific institution, including IEPs for ELs, highlighting the challenges with determining the level of IEP preparation educators receive in today's IHEs.

Professional Learning

Once hired, a new special educator relies upon on job training to transition from the classroom as a student to teaching as a profession. Through professional learning, teachers become familiar with the school culture, learn policies and procedures, understand content curriculum, and plan service delivery (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, & Kilgore, 2003).

Traditional district professional development programs assume a “one size fits all” approach and often do not address the unique challenges that novice special educators encounter (Griffin et al., 2003). Professional development in many school districts typically occurs during scheduled in-service days with experts (e.g., district specialists, fellow colleagues in the department, or external consultants) who provide training sessions on selected topics, most often to large groups of teachers. Concerns of typical professional development are that topics may be disconnected from the district’s larger purpose and may not include specific strategies to address the needs of diverse learners within the classroom. Also, teachers may have little accountability for implementation of professional development content after the presentation (Zepeda, 2008).

In addition, for special educators, a typical professional development session may include group meetings with other special education teachers within the district that occur outside the school work day (e.g., before or after school), rather than within professional learning communities that focus on continuous learning for all students. In many situations, the special educator develops IEPs for diverse learners independently without access to key cultural and linguistic information (e.g., language proficiency levels from English as a Second Language [ESL] teacher).

Fortunately, more contemporary ways of providing professional development have emerged (Combs & Silverman, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2012; Zepeda, 2008). Supports from a differentiated professional learning program must align with school, district, and state goals and standards (Learning Forward,

2011). Specifically, professional learning communities address the unique challenges of novice special education teachers, while honoring and promoting the growth of veteran teachers, which frames recommendations for generating IEPs as discussed in the next section. In addition, a previous article in this topical issue addresses contemporary professional development in working with educators of ELs within a school-wide CLR multitiered system of supports (MTSS) in rural communities.

Recommendations for Writing CLR IEPs

Within the context of professional standards, coursework, and resources, IHE training and professional development for improving the cultural and linguistic responsiveness of IEPs for diverse students are directly connected to the need to meet the demands of increased numbers of ELs in special education. Recommendations are provided for professionals at the special education teacher preservice level, and for those who are charged with working to ensure that the needs of diverse students with disabilities are met in the context of ongoing delivery of school services and professional development.

Teacher Preparation (Preservice)

Special education teachers obtain initial certification in a variety of ways with the traditional avenue being an accredited college or university program of study, though alternative options are becoming increasingly more prevalent (e.g., Teach for America, State Training Academies). However, regardless of the vehicle chosen to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to be a special education teacher today, it is essential that teachers are culturally and linguistically competent in both instruction and assessment. One key required skill set is the development of IEPs. The following recommendations, specific to cultural and linguistic diversity and IEP development, are provided to guide IHE instructors in their development and/or improvements of training experiences necessary to prepare teachers to create CLR IEPs:

- The 26 competencies related to culture and language, as stated in the CEC standards (CEC, 2015) should be incorporated throughout the teacher preparation program;
- Introductory coursework for special and general education teachers should include coverage of legal aspects regarding the education of learners with disabilities (e.g., Accommodations, IEPs) as related to cultural and linguistic qualities and practices;
- Inclusion courses (i.e., courses designed primarily for general education teachers) must present ways to differentiate instruction (e.g., group work, in-class responding) to reflect CLR teaching;
- Comprehensive coverage of legal, instructional, and best practices aspects of IEP development and implementation should be situated in one required course (e.g., methods, assessment) to ensure that an integrated application of IEP components occurs avoiding a disjointed training process for IEP development. This course must introduce or build on previously taught considerations of cultural and linguistic features of diverse students, and ways to address these qualities in the development of a meaningful IEP.
- Assessment coursework should include topics related to culture and language connecting assessment results with IEP development for diverse learners, such as developing CLR (a) present levels of academic achievement/functional performance, (b) measurable annual goals, (c) progress monitoring, and (d) determining the appropriate way for diverse learners with disabilities to participate in district-wide and state-wide testing.
- Methods coursework should include ways to accommodate individual needs and enhance instruction recognizing the cultural and linguistic features of students that may be incorporated into IEP.
- Behavior management coursework regularly needs to incorporate cultural/linguistic responsiveness into all facets of the course, with particular attention given to (a) conducting CLR functional behavior assessments (FBAs), and (b) developing CLR behavior intervention plans (BIPs). Strategies for incorporating results from both FBAs and BIPs into IEP development should be included in teacher preparation.
- “Specialty” courses (i.e., those courses that may or may not be part of the required program of study), such as a course on assistive technology and transition, should demonstrate how culture/language affect these aspects of IEP development and implementation.
- Fieldwork placements and the student teaching experiences should facilitate exposure to well-written CLR IEPs for diverse learners, building on training previously provided as part of required coursework.
- Toward the culmination of the program, systematic coverage of developing CLR IEPs must occur so that students can synthesize all of the various components and requirements for developing a CLR IEP.

Professional Learning in the Field (In-Service)

The following recommendations associated with induction and professional development are provided to improve the practice of both new and seasoned special education teachers and team members who provide instruction to diverse learners with disabilities.

Induction. Griffin et al. (2003) describe effective induction programs as those that provide regularly scheduled formal and informal interactions between novice and veteran teachers. Successful induction and all professional learning hinges on collaboration, which promotes reflective learning, counteracts professional isolation, and garners multiple perspectives on problems of practice (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Griffin et al. (2003) suggests continuous collaboration between special and general educators to (a)

ensure effective inclusive settings for all diverse learners, and (b) allow for proper training and planning with paraprofessionals and other related service providers. Collaboration creates greater understanding among school IEP team members which promotes the use of appropriate interventions within the inclusive settings and ensures that the needs of diverse learners are met (Billingsley, 2004). An educator team, comprised of special and general educators, may coordinate various activities through productive collaboration to include the following:

- Strategies for building ongoing professional learning communities to promote the development of CLR IEPs;
- Action research to identify and implement accommodations that support a learner's cultural and linguistic qualities and strengths;
- Collect and analyze data that accurately portrays a diverse student's skills;
- Gather input from family and community to increase the effective development and service delivery of CLR IEPs.

These and related recommendations should be incorporated into IHE special educator training to best prepare professionals for the challenging task of developing and implementing IEPs for diverse learners with disabilities.

Job-embedded professional development. The CEC standards discussed previously emphasize Learning Forward's focus on professional learning, and assume that as active participants in professional learning educators continuously reflect on and adjust best practice based on the needs of the student (CEC, 2015). Zepeda (2008) contends that a constructivist approach, different from a traditional approach, to professional learning is needed, because it allows teams of teachers to explore, question, and debate the integration of new ideas. Job-embedded professional development is one such method identified by researchers that directly involve educators in discovering and solving daily challenges

within their practice methods (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010). Through collaboratively planned activities such as peer observation, action research, and lesson study in IEP development for diverse learners, a school or district's job-embedded professional development team efficacy increases resulting in a more CLR IEP document.

The development of the job-embedded professional development team for diverse learners with disabilities should include several essential educators including, yet not limited to, the learners' general education teacher(s), special educator(s), and bilingual/English language development teacher, along with any related services staff who contributes to increased understanding of the learner's needs. During collaboration, all members collectively contribute to sharing information based on areas of expertise. For example, the general education teacher provides information to the team about the student's progress in regard to performance with the specific content, understanding of curriculum content, achievement data, and state standards with activities. The special education teacher shares information about the performance and skills of the students in relation to how the disability affects progress and performance. In addition, the bilingual/English language development teacher gives information on current English language proficiency, second language acquisition skill levels, and role of native language in teaching and learning.

Due to the recursive nature of job-embedded professional development, learners benefit from the engaging collaborative work of their educators (Zepeda, 2008). For example, the team performs job-embedded professional development to facilitate equitable access to classroom content upon receipt of the diverse learner's IEP articulating strengths, needs, supports, and skills. The collection and analysis of data guide instruction and selection of interventions. Once planned and implemented, IEP effectiveness is evaluated through additional data collection. These data inform any needed updates to the IEP and serve as the basis for planning

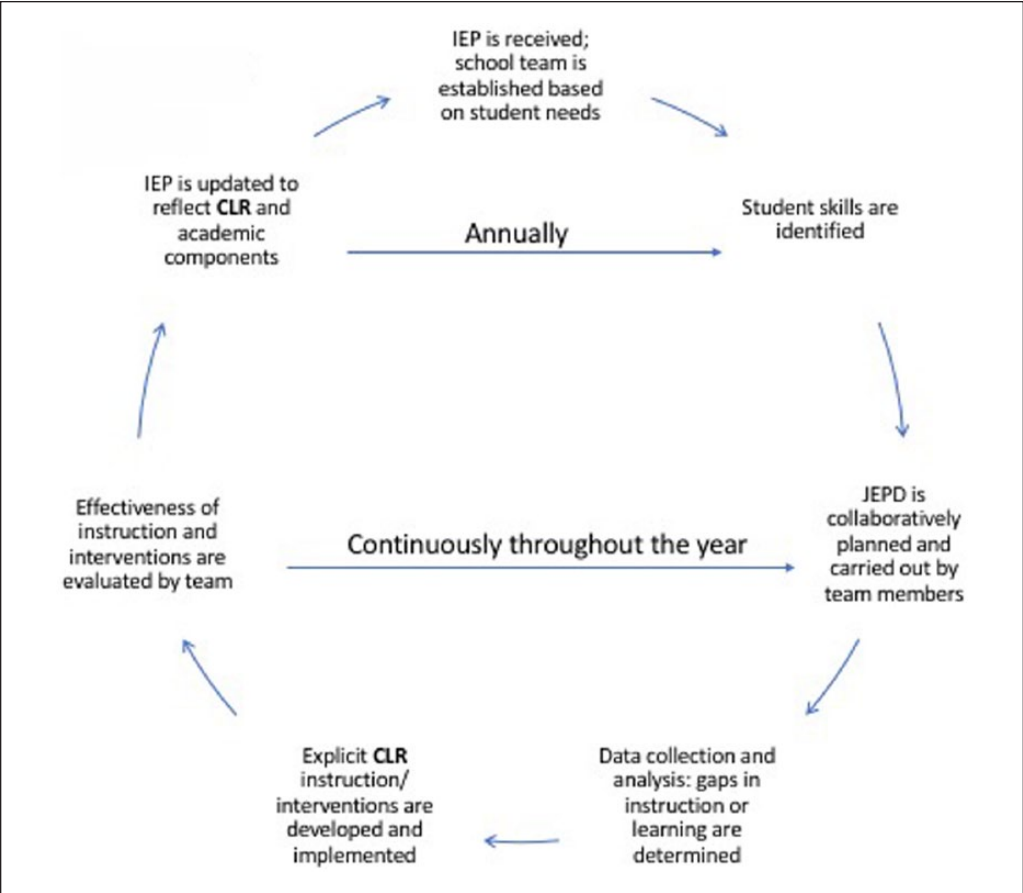


Figure 1. The integrated cycle of CLR IEPs and job-embedded professional development.
Note. IEP = Individualized Education Program; CLR = culturally and linguistically responsive; JEPD = Job-embedded professional development.

further job-embedded professional development activities.

As suggested, during instruction and delivery of services to the student, the team continually engages in job-embedded professional development, pinpointing learning gaps, planning and implementing instruction, and collecting more data that are then used to improve instruction and services to the student. Figure 1, developed from a combination of IEP material found within CEC (2015) and Croft et al. (2010), highlights the cyclical process of job-embedded professional development.

For illustration purposes, the process depicted in Figure 1 is applied to aspects of the CLR IEP developed for Lola (i.e., see Table 2). Initially, when using job-embedded professional development for Lola, the team

of educators implements use of student-friendly glossaries within the subject areas of math and reading, followed by determining the effectiveness through assessment scores, teacher reports, and observations of use of the glossaries. The team subsequently uses the data to determine whether or not to expand use of student-friendly glossaries into other content areas. In addition, the English language development (ELD) teacher and special educator observe Lola during math class to monitor her use of the glossary, further pinpointing her areas of progress and need, while researching other possible strategies to implement. Then, the English language development teacher and math teacher observe how the special education teacher implements the same glossary into Lola’s instruction. Similar

examination may be completed with any strategies that require additional data to determine effectiveness, such as the amount of extra time needed by Lola to break down the content outlined in the CLR IEP.

Though one example, the over-arching message is that school and district professional development should adhere to the principles that shape job-embedded professional development to continuously prepare educators to successfully guide diverse learners with disabilities to master IEP goals. Also, the reader is referred to a subsequent article in the issue that provides further information about job-embedded professional development and diverse learners.

Concluding Remarks

Today, special educators are serving an increasing number of diverse learners with disabilities. Thus, an ongoing development need is preparation for generating quality CLR IEPs. IEPs for diverse learners require attention to cultural and linguistic strengths and ways of learning to best provide access to curriculum and adequate progress toward achievement of annual goals. Whether through preservice education programs or advanced professional learning, it is essential that special education teachers refine and increase their abilities to recognize CLR strengths and skills of students and incorporate these items into the key components of the IEP. This article provided IHE teacher educators and professional learning program developers with recommendations and best practices to promote increased knowledge of CLR principles and practices necessary to generate CLR IEPs. Overall, the skills associated with recognizing diverse learners' language and cultural features are foundational to unlocking success in schools within the delivery of IEPs for diverse learners; skills that special educators initially acquire through educator preparation programming and further develop through district professional learning supports.

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