An exploration of general education teachers' perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students during a general education intervention (GEI) process

by

Natasha M Reyes

B.A., Wichita State University, 2005
M.A., Wichita State University, 2010

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
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Abstract

Disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education has been a concern for decades which continues to the present day. Policies and practices have been implemented to address this evidence of inequitable education. Those include RtI, prereferral processes, and appropriate evaluation practices. While these have been put into place, there is still cause for concern related to referral, evaluation, and placement of CLD students in special education. A body of research is available that discusses disproportionality on the special education side, but little is available that looks into the factors that impact disproportionality from the general education side.

To add to the current research focusing on the general education factors as they relate to disproportionality, the purpose of this study was to explore the data and language used by general education teachers when referring CLD students to a GEI process. The primary sources of data for this study were findings from a pilot study, observation, and semi-structured interviews with classroom teachers who have/had experience with the process and CLD students. Qualitative data gathered from these sources allowed for analysis, resulting in emergent themes.

Findings, obtained through pilot study document analysis, observation field notes, and five teacher interview transcripts indicated a *general lack of awareness, knowledge, and consideration on the impact of a student's biopsychosocial history within the academic setting*. Most notably, classroom teachers did not allow for contextualization of data, or student's stories, during this intervention process, and assumptions made related to parent/family behaviors further denied consideration of family/parent perspectives. Additionally, there was an overreliance on certain types of data, and lack of individualization for CLD students during the intervention process.

Whether disregard, or lack of understanding, the reduction of CLD students' stories and academic success to non-individualized, decontextualized data impacts the instruction, interventions, and appropriateness of referrals for CLD students. Further research is needed to determine reliability of teacher perceptions found within this study, implications from teachers' own biographies, and such may inform the recruitment and training needed to improve education for CLD students.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late grandmother, Edna Moody. While not here, she is ever-present with her colloquialisms and card games. You would have been my boys' PIC.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

As a professional in the field of education and special education who works within the public school setting, I have firsthand knowledge and experience with instruction, pre-referral, and the referral/evaluation process within a large, urban school district. Within my roles as a speech-language pathologist, an evaluator, and a special education support personnel for schools, it has become alarming to notice a consistent increase in requests for special education evaluations in the area of speech and language for our students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). District data shows an increase in speech and language evaluation referrals to the Cultural and Linguistic Diversity team for CLD students.

Enrollment within this large, urban, Midwest school district has steadily declined since at least the 2017-2018 school year (Elementary, 2022; Kansas, 2020). The enrollment during the 2017-2018 school year was listed as approximately 51,880 students, with data for the 2020-2021 school year recorded as approximately 48, 660 students (Kansas, 2020). This is a decrease of approximately 6.2%. The district also reported a decrease of approximately .71% of students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) from 2017-2018 to 2020-2021. Conversely, the number of ELL students that have been identified as having a disability has increased by .53% over the three academic years stated (Elementary, 2022). The referrals for speech and language concerns for CLD students has continuously increased each year as well (Elementary, 2022). Between the 2017-2018 and 2020-2021 school years, the referrals for CLD students for speech and language concerns has increased 14%. In 2017-2018, the district had 254 referrals for CLD speech and language concerns, and in 2020-2021 there were 296 referrals (Elementary, 2022). While the overall enrollment for students identified as ELL has decreased over the past three academic years, the number of students identified as having a disability has increased. This

creates the question: *'Why within the context of fewer overall students are more ELL students are being identified with special education needs?'*

The steady increase in referrals and ELL students identified as having a disability is alarming as the reverse was touted upon district implementation of a 'more proactive' general education intervention (GEI) system as a part of Response to Intervention (RtI) several years ago. In other words, with the more proactive intervention system in place within the RtI system, referrals should have decreased, not increased.

This chapter will be organized into the following sections: (1) definition of terms, (2) rationale, (3) research problem and purpose, (4) research question, and (5) theoretical framework.

Definition of Terms

CLD – This acronym represents the term culturally and linguistically diverse. It refers to students whose culture and/or language differ from that of the dominant language and/or culture in a society. This would encompass all individuals whose primary language is one other than solely English, among others (Herrera & Murry, 2005).

GEI – This refers to general education intervention. Prior to referral for a special education evaluation, districts must have engaged in this process, which provides targeted support to students matching their level of need, along with continuous monitoring of progress. This intervention can be encompassed in a school-wide approach, such as a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), or with an individual problem-solving approach (Kansas, n.d.).

IPSP – Individual Problem-Solving Process is the GEI process used at the study site. This process targets those students for which the most intensive interventions, outside those afforded all students, are needed to impact success.

RtI – Response to intervention is a multi-tiered instructional model that allows teachers to provide targeted interventions, assess and monitor the progress of students given the interventions. This is a part of the general education intervention process according to the National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI; 2010).

Rationale

Over-referral for special education evaluations and a disproportionate number of CLD students within special education are long-standing issues nationwide (Cabral, 2008; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Sullivan, 2011). Valencia (2011) defined disproportionality as the likelihood, or probability, of an individual's membership in a certain ethnic group impacting their identification as having a disability. Throughout history, many practices potentially leading to inappropriate referral and identification of CLD students have been highlighted through court cases, leading to a change in practices and policies to provide safeguards for CLD students (Bradley et al., 2007).

Among the practices designed to address inequities are Response to Intervention (RtI), appropriate assessment and evaluation of CLD students, and culturally relevant pedagogy. The issue of disproportionality, however, remains a constant in education, even with identified safeguards in place. Coutinho and Oswald (2000) cite an extensive study done in the early 1980s which focused on two issues as potential causes for disproportionality; the quality of services (general education or special education) received by the student and the referral and assessment process. In addition to looking into how practices, in general, can lead to disproportionality, research has delved into teacher perceptions of, and bias towards, students based on factors such as ethnicity, race, linguistic diversity, among others (Datnow et al., 2018; Greenfield, 2013; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) provides guidance related to eligibility and definitions of specific disabilities (IDEIA, 2004). Along with these definitions, IDEIA includes a set of exclusionary factors which professionals and teams must consider prior to determining the presence or absence of a disability (Whittaker & Ortiz, 2019). Any of the exclusionary factors must be found to not be the primary reason for a student's lack of success within the school setting. Among the exclusionary factors listed for a specific learning disability is lack of appropriate instruction, limited language (English) proficiency, as well as cultural or economic differences (Whittaker & Ortiz, 2019).

A study by Montalvo et al. (2014) demonstrated that inadequate insight to CLD students' prior knowledge, customs, and language impact instruction. In fact, per Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2012), instruction CLD students is often not culturally responsive, appropriate, or of adequate quality to enable academic success. Further, the number of teachers with experience and/or training in effective instruction for CLD students is minimal, with pervasive shortages nationwide (Rojas & Avitia, 2017). This speaks to decades of findings on *quality* of instruction as a potential cause of disproportionality (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). Impacts of insufficient or poor instruction are compounded by lack of consideration for the exclusionary factors lined out by IDEA (Whittaker & Ortiz, 2019). Among these, lack of adequate instruction is frequently neither recognized nor considered ('ruled out') as relevant to the cause of concern (Kovaleski et al., 2013).

This study explored the role that teacher perceptions and/or bias may play in the disproportionate representation of CLD students within special education, specifically with general education teachers. Several researchers have found that teacher expectations (including perceptions) impact their decision-making with students (Wessels et al., 2011; Zamudio et al.,

2011). Whittaker and Ortiz (2019) indicated cultural and racial bias as potentially having a role in disproportionality, reiterating the need for professionals to examine bias as a factor.

Students' abilities and achievement, as perceived by their teacher, have been shown to be impacted by the students' race and/or ethnicity (Greenfield, 2013; Minor, 2014; Peterson et al., 2016; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Often, European American or White students have more positive referrals and tend to be favored by teachers in comparison with non-White peers (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Studies designed to measure implicit bias have been used to gain insight into the inherent beliefs of participants, including teachers (Glock & Kovacs, 2013). This prompts the question: How do inherent beliefs originate and what is the impact on students within the general education classroom.

Jack Mezirow's (1991; 1997) notion of meaning perspectives provides a way to conceptualize and analyze origination of one's assumptions, biases, and perceptions. Specifically, the sociolinguistic meaning perspective envelopes the social norms, cultural/language codes, philosophies, scripts, language, and ethnocentrism that contribute to one's interpretations of students, from different cultures or languages, who do not perform as well as White students (Mezirow, 1991; Wessels et al., 2011). A wide range of dated or distorted beliefs and ideologies can manifest from one's meaning perspectives, including some conscious but mostly subconscious, culture-bound responses a student's race, cultural differences, country of origin, English language proficiencies (especially in speaking and reading), level of poverty (class), and more (Mezirow, 1997; Murry, 1995; Murry et al., 2021).

Research Problem and Purpose

To return full circle, disproportionality remains a constant issue within the field of special education. Research regarding disproportionality is at times abundant but often lacks

consideration of the role general education teachers and practices play in contributing to this issue (Waitoller et al., 2010). The gap between disproportionality and general education was investigated by exploring the data and language used by general education teachers when referring CLD students for the general education intervention process.

This is critical for CLD students, teachers, and the educational system in general as it provides deepened insight to the perceptions and actions of teachers. An individual's perceptions are often deeply ingrained and difficult to reflect upon on a conscious level (Mezirow, 1997). Family, community, culture, race, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity influence and create individual perceptions (Alcoff, 2006; Mezirow, 1997; Zamudio et al., 2011). Participation in a certain group or status influences perceptions, which can limit or distort beliefs and values (Zamudio et al., 2011). Therefore investigation of the perceptions and decisions made by general education teachers related to CLD students in this particular district has served to increase understanding of the phenomenon.

This qualitative study investigated teachers' perceptions through a case study methodology. Data analyzed were derived from multiple sources, including pilot study findings (document analysis), observation, and semi-structured interviews. Critical Discourse Analysis tools (Gee, 2011) were utilized to code the data, to reveal emergent themes. Furthermore, the triangulation of data increased validity and reliability of the findings.

The knowledge gained from this study can inform development of improved GEI practices and processes that result in greater resolution of student need in General Education (GE) settings in tandem with more appropriate referrals of CLD students for special education.

Research Question

1. In what ways do general education teachers describe their teaching, and factors they consider in, the GEI process for CLD Students?

Theoretical Framework

How do you know what you know? What is the *truth*? Are one person's knowledge and the making of meaning different than another's? Epistemology is the study of knowledge, with an understanding that one creates meaning and knowledge from their interactions (Bhattacharya, 2017). Bhattacharya (2017) states that constructionism, or the idea that meaning is based on an individual's interactions, is the type of epistemology that is most used within qualitative research.

In fact, Max Horkheimer, as referenced by Alcoff (2007), spoke of the desire of researchers to gather data and facts, as opposed to taking a more qualitative stance. He stated that the process of perception is a social activity that is in no way comprehensible through empirical data alone. His (Horkheimer) critical theory attempts to link the social production of knowledge and the social production of society (Alcoff, 2007). In other words, knowledge is the product or based on, one's conscious activity, or experiences and interactions. Knowledge is not something that just exists or is pre-determined (2007). To frame this qualitative study, the concepts of meaning perspectives, storytelling, and colorblindness were used. This theoretical framework provided the lens through which analysis occurred.

Individual Perceptions

Perceptions are formed from lived experiences and interactions with the social world (Zamudio et al., 2011). These perceptions guide an individual's idea of what it means to be smart, at-risk, educated, or even academically successful (Zamudio et al., 2011). Our lived experiences and interactions help create our perceptions (Zamudio et al., 2011). Perceptions are based in understanding and knowledge, resulting from lived experiences.

Zamudio et al. (2011) claim that an individual's epistemological orientation develops based on their experiences, backgrounds (race, gender, class), and lives. Similarly, Wessels et al. (2011) reference Mezirow's meaning perspectives which state that one's meaning perspective and expectations frame the beliefs and views held. This can include things such as culture/language, social norms/roles, ethnocentrism, and philosophies/theories. In fact, such perspectives influence an individual's idea of what it means to be smart, at-risk, educated, or even academically successful (Zamudio et al., 2011). These factors can limit or distort an individual's perspective that they use to understand experiences.

Consideration of epistemology requires investigation into the impacts of an individual's knowledge and beliefs on their perceptions, as well as the general idea of perception. Linda Alcoff discusses the theory of perception and its impact on an individual's epistemic beliefs in her book *Visible Identities* (2006). Alcoff states that an individual's perceptions create the sort of foundation or setting for all thoughts. These perceptions are not visible, rather hidden and implied, which makes them (perceptions) difficult for critical reflection (Alcoff, 2006). Alcoff further mentions work done by Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, among others, suggesting that perception relates to ways in which individuals place themselves in the world, how they orient. This, in turn, determines how meanings are made and the world interpreted (Alcoff, 2006). Other philosophers concur that the outcome of perceptions, which are never truly individual, is a result of "our upbringing, heritage, and identity," (Alcoff, 2006, p. 203). If true, a teacher's perceptions can impact how they see, or view, students, impacting their actions. The role that race and gender may play in perceptions is also discussed.

Alcoff states that raced and gendered identities help structure one's perception which then, in effect, makeup or provide the background for how one knows the world. She states that

these race and gendered identities are socially produced and guide how we think/know, feel, and act and form our *epistemological perspectives* (Alcoff, 2006). In fact, at a basic level, how an individual perceives events or people can be impacted by race and gender (Alcoff, 2006).

It is at this basic level where people develop their perceptions of credibility, identity, relationships, and relevant concepts (Alcoff, 2006). Alcoff describes these as *epistemic judgments* (2006). For example, Lorraine Code argued against the idea that everyone's epistemic beliefs would be interchangeable if given access to the same perceptual information (Code, 2007). She stated that this might be true for beliefs that are not as complex, such as stating "the sun is shining," (Code, 2007, p. 41), but if the thoughts are more complex and relate to more complicated processes involving judgment (e.g. "XX is honest"), then the individual's history of experiences will impact his/her/their judgment (2007). Such suggests that perceptions, especially those involving epistemic beliefs or judgments, including those about race and gender, are deeply ingrained and not easily altered.

As previously stated, individuals' perceptions of their world are hidden from a conscious level. This makes acknowledgment of, and reflection upon, their presence a challenge. Lack of awareness and means to reflect render such perceptions resistant to "alteration," (Alcoff, 2006, p. 188). To reiterate an example of perception given by Alcoff, one might think of racial profiling. Racial profiling is a discriminatory practice that involves targeting individuals based on race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin (ACLU, 2021). The individual that is profiling another based on race is not aware of the judgment they invoke, rather all they perceive is danger, but this danger is based on their perceptions (which they are not consciously aware of at this moment) of a race (Alcoff, 2006).

Storytelling and Colorblindness

Storytelling and colorblindness are concepts that help explore/explain the relationship of race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Research by Delgado & Stefancic (2012) produced several principles that explain this relationship. These principles include: 1) the idea that racism is ordinary, a common occurrence in this country, 2) the dominant group benefits from the systems of racism, 3) race is a social construct, and 4) storytelling is crucial for communicating the *voice* of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Each principle is briefly discussed herein, followed by ways in which principles have/can be utilized in education.

The first principle maintains that racism is ordinary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The idea of this principle is that racism is not a rare occurrence, rather it is common for individuals of color to experience racism throughout their daily lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The second principle is comprised of at least two features, *interest convergence* and *colorblindness*. Delgado & Stefancic (2012) discuss the idea of interest convergence for the dominant group.

Interest convergence is the idea that the dominant group supports, or marginalizes, groups of people based on what would benefit them [dominant group] at that time (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This idea allows for fluidity from the dominant group. Which groups of people are marginalized can vary, all dependent upon what benefits the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). For example, the varying percentages of individuals from one race or ethnic group being identified in a certain disability category (Learning Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Intellectual Disability, etc.) at different points in time (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000).

The second feature, colorblindness, makes visible only the most blatant discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In doing so, other forms of racism are not acknowledged in order for, or in accordance with preferred perceptions of equality/equity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

This lack of acknowledgement also benefits the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Promotion of the concept "colorblind" provides a basis for individuals to convey a state of virtuosity. They are *not* racist (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; DiAngelo, 2018; Zamudio et al., 2011). As stated previously, declarations of 'colorblindness' maintain the idea that equality already exists, or that programs/policies are already in place, and sufficient, to combat racism (DiAngelo, 2018). Conversely, Joseph et al. (2016) found that policies and practices currently in place do not address serious issues of race, and can minimalize such issues in both school and society.

Apfelbaum et al. (2012) assert colorblindness to be rooted in the belief that race is not relevant, or need be considered, to form opinions, make decisions, or determine behaviors. While colorblindness appears in multiple arenas (e.g. personal interactions, organizations, society) it, too, has made its way into the realm of education (Apfelbaum et al., 2012). Being 'colorblind' is often seen as desirable (Markus et al., 2000), with the focus on similarities, but recent evidence suggests a more negative and prejudicial impact (Mekawi et al., 2017). In education, specifically, the concept of colorblindness serves to maintain the status quo, again, presuming equality and equity of instruction and resources (Joseph et al., 2016; Parsons & Turner, 2014). Maintaining a *status quo* at any given time aligns with the idea of interest convergence.

The third of Delgado and Stefancic's principles (2012) holds that race, or races, are the product of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, Zamudio et al., 2011). Which individuals are considered a certain race can change throughout time, often to the benefit of the dominant group (interest convergence) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In fact, racism is much more than just negative opinions of members of another group, rather it is in place to help determine and maintain privilege and status for the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Examples

given include who gets the best loans, the best schools, the best jobs, and invitations to the premier parties. This idea ties directly into the previously described idea of interest convergence in that groups support or marginalize other groups based on what would benefit them at that time.

Finally, the fourth principle revolves around the idea of *storytelling* to convey experiences with racism and make known, or breakdown the stereotypes and myths related to people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). As defined by Oliver Serrat (n.p., 2008), "storytelling is the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life-lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights." Storytelling hopes to communicate these experiences with others that may not have direct experience with racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). However, storytelling has broader uses and implications.

Outside of sharing instances of racism experienced, storytelling, itself, can provide context to the lived experiences of those not often heard (Annamma, 2015). This may be especially pertinent within the context of a deficit perspective (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002 as cited in Roy & Roxas, 2011). In fact, Goessling (2018) used a storytelling method to challenge the deficit perspective portrayed about urban youth. In education, a *deficit* model, or perspective, allows for students to be identified without context, and puts the onus to accommodate on the student, versus the system (Annamma, 2015). Within this deficit model, the knowledge that the student brings is often ignored, devalued, or completely silenced from the educational discourse (Bernal, 2002, Taylor et al., 2009, Solorzano & Yosso, 2002 as cited in Goessling, 2018). While often ignored, it is such resources as student and family biographies, and lived experiences that

need to take a front seat in school curriculum and teaching, especially for CLD students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Indeed, researchers advance storytelling as a way to breakdown stereotypes (Goessling, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Storytelling gives voice, as well as combats, data/views and negative stereotypes often associated with people and communities that differ from the majority group (Goessling, 2018). This is critical as the views of the majority are often seen as "neutral," "truth," and "objective," (Goessling, 2018). As established by Alcoff (2006) and Mezirow (1991, 1997) , an individual's beliefs and values are deeply ingrained, or known on a subconscious level. Therefore it can be surmised that this also holds true for the majority views stated by Goessling (2018). This is critical as Delgado and Stefancic (2012) state that preconceived notions, individual privileges, and space in society are rarely challenged, or critically reflected upon, on an individual level.

Meaning Perspectives

Individuals' perceptions are created and impacted by their community, culture, race, etc. These perceptions create the frames in which individuals think of concepts such as success, knowledge, intelligence, credibility, and what/who is *good,* among others. These epistemic judgments are difficult to alter, or consciously reflect upon. Race and gender are among the epistemic beliefs/judgments that are deeply ingrained in an individual, and connected to their own racial or gender identity. What is the extent of the impact of a teacher on students that are culturally and linguistically diverse when the idea of perceptions is known? Many researchers have studied education, schools, and culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Zamudio et al., (2011) provide examples and a different lens with which to examine education reform (desegregation), class assignment, availability of courses, standardized

assessments, teacher expectations, deficit-minded thinking, epistemology, teacher assignment, and type of instruction with respect to inequality within education. Specifically, Zamudio et al., (2011) reviewed studies that have shown that students from lower socioeconomic classes have attended *poorer* schools, and had fewer options for elective and core classes when compared to peers attending *richer* schools. Typically, veteran teachers are assigned the advanced classes, while new teachers are instructing beginner and/or remedial classes. The remedial classes contained students that were deemed to need the most support, and intensive instruction and strategies. Additionally, instruction within the advanced courses was noted to differ from that seen within the beginning, remedial, and/or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. The advanced courses tended to engage students in active, critical thinking, social and constructivist approaches whereas a more traditional approach (passive, individualist, and uncritical) seen in the instruction of general and remedial classes (Zamudio et al., 2011). Although reforms have been put into place to combat such inequality and discriminatory practices, there has not been evidence to show a reduction in racism or inequality within education, and at times such reforms may exacerbate the issue (Zamudio et al., 2011).

Similar to the racial profiling example given by Alcoff, teachers may not hear or be aware of their inherent perceptions impacting their decisions, expectations, and actions, but therein lies the need to *make the invisible visible*, bringing to light the background from which the knowledge of self and others comes from (Alcoff, 2006). Jack Mezirow's (1991) idea of meaning perspectives provides insight into where such assumptions/bias/perceptions might originate, as one potential factor. Mezirow defines meaning perspectives as the frame of reference (created from habitual expectations) that is used to create one's belief system to interpret and evaluate experiences (1991). The habitual experiences, or habits of mind, used by

Mezirow, are individuals' ways of "thinking, feeling, and acting," (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6) that are heavily influenced by codes. The codes can be impacted by culture, society, education, the economy, political, and/or are psychological. Unlike Mezirow's "points of view," habits of mind are more ingrained within a person and harder to change or adapt (Mezirow, 1997).

Mezirow's sociolinguistic meaning perspective contains numerous influences that can lead to shaping or limiting one's perspective. An individual's social norms/roles, ethnocentrism, prototypes/scripts, philosophies, cultural/language codes, language, and secondary socialization are all influences that can contribute to their sociolinguistic meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1991; Wessels et al., 2011). In *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* Mezirow discusses how individuals' meaning perspectives are defined and formed by those guiding/responsible for socialization, and by an individual's culture. The impact of parent perspectives, biographies, social status, etc., all influence one's concept of reality and how things should be. These influences/factors are then internalized by children, forming their meaning perspectives or habits of mind, among which can include prejudices, biases, racism, sexism, etc. (Mezirow, 1991).

In summary, an individual's *knowledge* and perceptions are shaped and developed based on his/her/their experiences and background. The impact of culture, upbringing, and social sphere is evident in each person's perspectives, whether conscious or not. Utilizing prior scholars' work with meaning perspectives, storytelling, and colorblindness, the impact of teachers' perceptions on CLD students were investigated. Specifically, this study explored the language used and information cited by general education teachers during the general education intervention process for CLD students.

Subjectivity Statement

As this study delved into the concepts of perceptions and meaning perspectives, it is important to share my own. The following is a statement of my subjectivities.

I am a Hispanic female with a skin color that is clear evidence of my ethnic diversity. I grew up with a Hispanic mother who had the self-realized "privilege of skin color," as she had green eyes, light brown hair, and a fair complexion. My mother was also a speech-language pathologist (SLP). She was the only SLP that spoke both English and Spanish in a large, urban Midwestern school district for decades. As one can imagine, I grew up living and breathing issues related to the SLP profession, issues related to culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, and hearing the battles constantly fought by my mother. I would be remiss to think that this did not and does not impact my interest and passion for certain issues, as well as influenced my career choice.

I am also a speech-language pathologist. I work in a large, culturally diverse, urban Midwestern school district. I went to school in this district, my mom worked in this school district, and now I work in this district. As a CLD SLP working in this district for over a decade now, in the areas of both speech and language, as well as special education overall, I have firsthand knowledge and experiences related to educational practices. This includes general education practices, pre-referral processes, as well as special education evaluations for CLD students. I, along with my team, have created and presented numerous professional developments (PD) on the topic of appropriate general education interventions (GEI), culturally and linguistically respectful and appropriate evaluations for CLD students, the GEI process in general among other education-related topics impacting CLD students. These PDs have been attended by colleagues within the district as well as state conferences.

Within my experience as a professional in the field of general and special education, the steady increase in requests for special education referrals for CLD students has raised concerns and hinted at deeper issues. In reviews of evaluations and pre-referral documents, inappropriate evaluation practices, lack of understanding, and statements that devalue or depersonalize students have been observed. Comments from professionals during evaluation meetings, problem-solving meetings, and conversations have fostered my desire to explore the meaning and understanding behind such words. A few examples of late, made by professionals, include "Well the student is bilingual so we should go ahead and just test [for special education]," "This is all these [CLD] students can do," "Special education will help teach them [CLD students] English," "Everyone benefits from being in special education," "If I don't help them then I know where they will end up [in jail]," and "[Student] has no language." Such verbalized thoughts in addition to the increase in speech and language referrals for CLD students have ignited my desire to explore the meaning of comments and the thinking of the individuals making these comments.

Firsthand experience with my topic of interest has been the driving force for my research. This has presented both potential benefits and struggles for me as a researcher. While professional experience has afforded familiarity with the vocabulary and concepts of reference, passion for the topic may factor in the interpretation of some comments. Critical reflection was employed during every stage of this process to minimize impacts of subjectivity on my part.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The discussion in this chapter is organized into the following sections: (1) a brief history of Response to Intervention (RtI), (2) disproportionality in special education for CLD students, (3) a discussion of teacher implicit bias, (4) the impact of teacher perception on perceived student ability and achievement, and (5) the need to look into meaning perspectives of teacher perceptions to guide professional development/understanding to positively impact CLD student referrals to special education.

Response to Intervention

One of the shifts in education that claims to reduce inappropriate referral and reduce disproportionality (if implemented appropriately) is the Response to Intervention (RtI) model. This model came about as a result of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, formerly Education for All Handicapped Children Act) reauthorization in 1997. The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA) of 1975 ensured a free and appropriate education (FAPE) for students with disabilities, and specifically named Specific Learning Disability (SLD) as one of the designated categories of disability (Kovaleski et al., 2013). Determination and identification of a student with SLD were based on the definition that a student whose academic achievement was not commensurate with ability level had a learning disability. In other words, a discrepancy was present. How this discrepancy was quantified was left to individual states to determine, which created inconsistency from state to state.

This inconsistency at the state level increased the number of students identified as SLD, nationwide. According to Kovaleski et al., (2013), from 1977-1990 the number of students identified with SLD increased 3.4% (from 1.8% to 5.2%). Factors contributing to "low achievement" were often not thoroughly considered. Among these were: inadequate instruction,

strong procedures in place to rule out other causes, optimism about the identification of SLD, and bias on the part of individuals involved in the instruction and subsequent identification of students for special education (Kovaleski et al., 2013). Concern emerged around the accurate and adequate identification of students with disabilities. This created a need to investigate other avenues for referral and evaluation of students with disabilities (Bradley et al., 2007). From this investigation, the RtI model emerged**.**

Components of RtI

A Response To Intervention (RtI) program is a multi-tiered instructional model comprised of at least three tiers wherein teachers assess the progress of students, provide interventions at the correct level, and monitor the progress of the students given the interventions undertaken (Preston et al., 2016; NCRTI, 2010). The National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI) identifies four major components to RtI. These include a multi-level system of supports, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, and screening (NCRTI, 2010).

A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) typically includes three tiers of intervention support, increasing in intensity, which incorporates universal screeners and progress monitoring to determine the appropriate level of support or intervention. The "tiers" can be thought of, and are typically depicted, as a triangle. A majority of the students (85-90%) should fall within the first tier or the bottom portion of the triangle. Based on universal screeners and diagnostic assessments of targeted skills, students requiring more intense and frequent support may be considered may be placed in tier two (middle third of triangle). Finally, the uppermost portion of the triangle is considered tier three, which consists of students requiring the most intensive intervention and supports (Kovaleski et al., 2013).

According to Kovaleski et al., (2013) components of each tier include evidence-based intervention programs, standards-aligned instruction, universal screening and diagnostics, and progress monitoring. Other outcomes of a properly implemented RtI program include 1) integration of special education into general education, 2) a reduction of factors leading to disproportionality, and therefore 3) a decrease in over-representation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students referred for and identified as needing to receive special education services (Bagasi, 2014; Enrique et al., 2013; Montalvo et al., 2014).

Enrique et al., (2013) reviewed RtI and the potential impact on disproportionality. The authors found that while the discrepancy model of the EHA focused more on intrinsic factors of students' ability to learn, RtI includes examining how *external factors* may be impacting student achievement. External factors may include inadequate classroom instruction, instruction that is not culturally relevant, classroom and/or school climate, and the validity of instructional interventions for *all* students (Enrique et al., 2013; Harry & Klingner, 2007).

Consideration of external factors in RtI programs may be a "viable approach" towards reducing achievement gaps (Enrique et al., 2013), as prevention of academic failure via prompt attention to gaps in achievement provides support for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Harry & Klingner, 2007). Based on the RtI framework, such support for CLD students' achievement may impact those students' rates of referral and identification for special education.

The belief is that a fully comprehensive RtI program, that is well implemented, will also make the identification of learning and behavioral difficulties more meaningful (NCRTI, 2010). In addition, Kovaleski et al., (2013) report that a well-implemented multi-tiered system of support should garner a high number of proficient students (85-90%), and much smaller number of students who continue to demonstrate significant need.

A Multi-tiered System of Support framework (MTSS) is currently implemented in many regions of the United States. While sometimes used interchangeably, MTSS and RtI are not the same (Kansas, 2010). RtI is a direct result of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (Kansas, 2010; IDEA, 1997). A Multi-tiered System of Supports is a broad approach that encompasses RtI practices (Kansas, 2010). More specifically, RtI focuses on intervention and instruction, while MTSS incorporates actions toward indictors of sustainable, systematic change through a feedback loop (Kansas, 2010). As RtI is encompassed by MTSS, focuses largely on intervention and instruction, and is a direct result of a legal act, RtI is the focus and terminology of this study.

RtI Implementation

Proper implementation is a critical component of RtI programs and the intended outcomes **(**Arden et al., 2017; NCRTI, 2010). According to O'Connor and Freeman (2012), some schools have achieved great success with the implementation of RtI, however, many schools struggle to determine what, if anything, has changed within their school since implementation. Among these are schools in the Midwest that have not seen results suggestive of significant improvement in achievement or behavior subsequent to implementation of RtI (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Similarly, Arden et al. (2017) and Balu et al. (2015) discuss issues related to lack of implementation fidelity, inconsistent interpretation of data, and potential negative impacts of RtI.

Research regarding challenges to RtI provides insight into emerging considerations around the implementation and outcomes of RtI programs. Montalvo et al. (2014) discuss the need for teacher "buy-in" to an RtI program. Lack of buy-in can pose a challenge to the proper implementation of a program, especially with CLD students. Montalvo et al. (2014) further state

that there is a need for a clearly defined purpose, with roles and responsibilities well documented. With a defined purpose, roles, and responsibilities, it would make sense for teams working within an RtI system to have a shared vision and goal. Little (2013) reviewed research and discussed possible barriers to team collaboration within RtI. Philosophical and practical barriers within teams can hinder proper implementation. Philosophical barriers were defined as those relating to beliefs and practices of teams that conflict with the goals and beliefs of the process (Little, 2013). Practical barriers were considered more logistical, which included time, team purpose, training, and goals (Little, 2013).

When discussing philosophical barriers such as individual and team beliefs about a process, an individual's beliefs regarding CLD students and the impacts thereof must be considered. Cabral (2008) found key differences in the perceptions of teachers regarding the purpose of intervention processes and district intent for the adoption of an MTSS/RtI. For example, few interventions cited specific academic recommendations, in contrast to the literature on the intent of an RtI program. Instead, a majority of the 'team' recommendations designated separate, segregated intervention treatment rather than instructional accommodations for language during 'core.' The term *core* in education refers to courses that students are required to take, often involving math, science, English language arts, and social studies (Core, 2013). Of the five most common interventions listed, none required the teacher to alter his/her/their methods of instruction (Cabral, 2008). Such findings reflect a continued predisposition to interpret achievement as student-held, negating the power of data to improve instruction, a central tenant of RtI. These phenomena speak to the critical need for research around the interventions and conversations that occur when CLD students struggle in school. This is

mirrored by Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2012) who claimed that the research on interventions found appropriate for CLD students is actually quite limited.

Response to Intervention was initiated in part to combat the disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education, and increase culturally relevant and appropriate instruction and interventions. Many factors impact the effectiveness of an RtI program, including philosophical beliefs, practices, and perceptions of staff (Cabral 2008; Hoover, 2012).

Disproportionality of CLD Students in Special Education

The push towards using an RtI model in education includes an identified potential outcome of reduced disproportionality within special education (Montalvo et al., 2014). This concept of disproportionality dates back decades within the education system. IDEA includes a clear statement that requires assessment, identification, and services for children with disabilities to be non-discriminatory (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). A difference (economic and/or environmental disadvantage/status, linguistic difference, experiential, educational opportunity, ethnic/racial differences, etc.) that can account for a student's lowered achievement compared with peers is not a disability (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Hoover, 2012; IDEIA, 2004).

Disproportionate representation is defined by Valencia (2011, p. 217) as "the extent to which membership in a given ethnic group affects the probability of being placed in a specific disability category." The U.S. Department of Education Statistics provides data stating that 14.7% of English Learner (EL) students are identified with a learning disability, while 12% of the general population is identified as having a learning disability (Haas & Brown, 2019). Coutinho & Oswald (2000) reviewed a study that analyzed the data of 66 local education agencies (LEA). They found that for three exceptionality categories African-Americans were

over-represented in 62 of the 66 LEAs. Coutinho and Oswald (2000) noted various definitions and ways of determining the extent of disproportionality in special education, however the fact that there is a disproportionate representation of minorities is not in contention (Haas & Brown, 2019; Hoover et al., 2018; Klingner et al., 2006).

Disproportionality impacts children from underserved ethnic or racial groups (e.g. Black, Latino, American Indian) (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2012). For the purposes of this study, the focus is on children regarded as culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). Per the definition given, the term CLD can encompass children from various backgrounds. However, this study dealt mainly with those identified as students with a background of exposure to, and/or use of a language other than English.

The predominant practices for the identification of culturally and linguistically diverse students contain a bias towards culture, experience, language, and race (Hoover et al., 2018). Such practices often include standardized assessments, many of which contain inherent biases which negatively impact (false identification) culturally and linguistically diverse students (Abedi, 2008; Abedi & Faltis, 2015; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). One potential hypothesis put forth by Coutinho & Oswald (2000) as a potential cause/reason for disproportionality is that referral for special education, assessments, and eligibility rely on tools that are "culturally and linguistically loaded," (p. 147).

Haas and Brown (2019) and Kovaleski et al. (2013) have identified several possible factors for this phenomenon. For example, placement in special education for English Learner (EL) students may be proposed to "help" students when nothing else 'has worked,' (Coutinho et al., 2002; Haas & Brown, 2019). Haas and Brown (2019) reflect on whether or not low-quality instruction is a factor and to what extent. Kovaleski et al. (2013) note that historically, one of the

problems with the model of referring students for evaluation for special education is that lack of adequate instruction was not ruled out as an exclusionary factor, or considered as a cause for concern with student achievement. NCRTI includes culturally and linguistically responsive instruction as a component of any appropriate RtI program (2010).

As an exclusionary factor for identification of disability, adequate and appropriate instruction, and the consideration thereof are critical to implementation of RtI (Enrique et al., 2013). If implemented correctly, an RtI program will include instruction that is culturally responsive and relevant for students (NCRTI, 2010). Upon examination, the research on the academic instruction many CLD students receive demonstrates myriad points of concern (Montalvo et al., 2014; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2012; Rojas & Avitia, 2017). Persistent among these is the impact of access to appropriate instruction for CLD students referred for special education evaluations.

Instruction for CLD students

CLD students' prior knowledge, customs, and language impact classroom access. Indeed, the effectiveness of classroom instruction and the need for instructors/teachers that understand students' background is essential for effective instruction (Montalvo et al., 2014). Although critical for appropriate instruction, Rojas and Avitia (2017) highlight the nationwide shortage of teachers trained to effectively instruct CLD students.

Due to this shortage and lack of trained, qualified teachers to address the needs of CLD students, access to instruction can and does affect CLD student achievement (Rojas & Avitia, 2017). Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2012) contend that instruction given to CLD students is typically not culturally responsive, of high quality, or appropriate. Herrera and Murry (2016) expand upon this argument by adding that these students' lack of opportunities for enrichment,

technology, and instructional materials further instructional inadequacies and inequity. In addition, Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2012) note multiple factors that contribute to the achievement gap of CLD students. Among those are quality of teaching, teacher expectations, culturally inappropriate assessments, and loss of instructional time due to overrepresentation in suspension and expulsions (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2012). The evidence from research reiterates the critical necessity of appropriate and quality instruction from teachers that have been adequately trained (Herrera & Murry, 2016; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2012). Also highlighted, is the shortage and lack of appropriately trained teachers and instruction for CLD students. Attention to, and accountability for, the instruction of CLD students is crucial for RtI to achieve its purported outcomes, specifically for CLD students and the issue of disproportionality.

Disproportionality and Systemic Bias

Haas and Brown (2019) reference Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) which claims that disproportionality results from systemic racism. This systemic racism arises from the processes which identify and remediate individuals with disabilities based on the perceived 'deficits' of students absent consideration of beliefs and practices of educators and society which may blame the students for their consequent struggles (2019). Similar sentiments were echoed previously by Cabral (2008) and Zamudio et al., (2011).

Manifestations of bias suggest that stronger consideration should be given to the 1) validity and potential bias of assessment and decision-making tools used, 2) potential for racial bias among members of the referring teacher/team in the interpretation of CLD students' behaviors or skill sets, and 3) impact such precepts have on decision-making processes (such as RtI and problem-solving processes). More importantly, such factors need to be considered when teams interpret information from cultures/ethnicities that differ from their own (Coutinho &

Oswald, 2000). In fact, Herrera et al., (2020) contend that efforts of teachers and staff trying to understand behaviors reflecting different cultural norms and experiences, often lead to inaccurate assumptions and misguided responses to the instructional 'concern.' Inaccurate assumptions and understanding of a behavior or skill align with the evidence from Rojas and Avitia (2017) and Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2012) discussed previously.

Cabral's (2008) findings reflect an overarching interpretation of student success as a condition "caused" in a sense, by the student rather than interaction between student and instructional methods. This point is echoed by Zamudio et al., (2011) who discuss a deficit-minded approach in their work with Critical Race Theory in education. Zamudio et al., (2011) discuss numerous education reforms that have been put into place in an attempt to provide equality in education and integrate students that are culturally and linguistically diverse. The belief, however, is that since such reforms are in place, educators and policymakers see the difference in achievement between white students and CLD students as attributable to deficiencies associated with the student rather than systemic or instruction problems (Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Zamudio et al., 2011). In fact, the authors of *Critical Race Theory Concepts and Education*, Zamudio et al., (2011), state that "rather than questioning the validity of the principle of meritocracy in a structurally unequal society, traditional approaches focus on the individual student (and his/her/their race and its value) to explain these failures," (p. 14). This deficit-minded approach allows educators to "blame" students without looking at the institution itself, or as stated by Cabral (2008) and Harry and Klingner (2007), the quality and responsivity of actual instruction and interventions taking place, in the classroom and in the school.

Teacher Perceptions

Focusing on the student via a deficit-minded lens ignores the impact of individual, staff, and teacher perceptions on the decision-making process associated with the RtI system. Zamudio et al., (2011), along with Wessels et al., (2011), reference meaning perspectives in teachers' decisions with students. These perceptions impact interactions with students. Often, teachers interact in a more positive, encouraging, and motivating manner with those students that they perceive will be more successful while interacting conversely with a student they do not expect to succeed (Zamudio et al., 2011). Unfortunately, per Critical Race (CR) Theorists, teachers who hold low expectations for students based on race, often fail to acknowledge or realize that the attitudes about race within the broader society impact their interactions with minority students (Zamudio et al., 2011).

To dig deeper into teacher perceptions related to CLD students, concepts of implicit and explicit bias were also explored. Clark and Zygmunt (2014) discuss both explicit and implicit bias. They refer to more overt, discriminatory behavior/practices as being examples of explicit bias, while implicit bias is often subtle, or even unconscious (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014). Similarly, others have described explicit attitudes as more conscious and controlled behaviors, with implicit attitudes/bias being more spontaneously revealed (Glock & Kovacs, 2013). Although implicit bias may be less obvious, Glock and Kovacs (2013) found implicit attitudes to portray greater negativity and be more often predictive of teacher behavior.

As implicit attitudes may be more spontaneous, they may also be deeply embedded subconsciously with individuals not fully aware of their beliefs. This has far-reaching implications for children's education (Glock & Kovacs, 2013). Similarly, Chamberlain (2005) highlighted *culture clashes* while Hoover (2012) discussed *misperceptions* amongst general education teachers and students that can lead to over-referral for special education evaluation.

Recommendations to rectify such *culture clashes* appear to begin with acknowledgment and awareness on the part of the educator (Chamberlain, 2005). The implicit biases held by teachers, combined with *culture clashes*, and inadequate teacher training, are persistent factors to explore in the referrals of CLD students for special education.

Interestingly, a study done by Clark and Zygmunt (2014) found that when given an Implicit Association Test (IAT), a majority of educators in the study demonstrated a preference for European American students, but also fell within the "disregard/disbelief" category when presented with the results of their test. This research gives credence to the *subconscious* or unaware nature of perceptions or biases held by individuals, while also touching on the need for educators to first acknowledge their individually held perceptions.

The implications of teacher attitudes and perceptions have been documented in several other studies. One study utilizing an Implicit Association Task (IAT), found that when the explicit expectations of teachers were high and their implicit prejudice favored a student's ethnicity, there was an advantage with measures of achievement at the end of a school year. This was done using IAT with a pairing task in which participants were shown images of success with surnames commonly associated with different ethnic groups (Peterson et al., 2016). The authors noted various limitations within this study, however other research has found similar outcomes related to bias towards linguistically diverse or ethnically diverse students.

One small qualitative study performed by Greenfield (2013) found that all participants had made assumptions related to a linguistically diverse student, the student's family, and the language of the home. A majority of the participants used deficit-minded language when describing the student and the student's achievement (2013). Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) found that teachers in general held more positive expectations for European American students over

ethnic minority children, and made more positive referrals for programs such as gifted for European American students. Conversely, teachers made more negative referrals for special education services for African-American and Latino/a students.

Overall, numerous studies have implicated teacher perceptions and bias related to student characteristics as influential to teacher perceptions of student ability and achievement, regardless of actual academic progress (Minor, 2014; Peterson et al., 2016; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). It is these perceptions/biases that may guide teacher behavior, which in turn impacts the self-image of students related to academics, at least. Again, this can have a long-lasting impact on students throughout schooling and life (Minor, 2014).

Meaning Perspectives and Teacher Perceptions

Role of Race and Gender

To recap, over-representation in special education for CLD students is a critical issue. Policies and practices have been enacted sporadically throughout history in attempts to combat the disproportionate representation of CLD students (Bradley et al., 2007). Response to Intervention (RtI) is one practice. Implemented correctly, RtI aims to reduce inappropriate referrals to special education and consequently disproportional representation in special education. However, many barriers exist to the proper implementation of this model (Bagasi, 2014; Enrique et al., 2013; Montalvo et al., 2014; O'Connor and Freeman, 2012). Additionally, multiple factors play a role in disproportionate referrals of CLD students and their consequent placement in special education. Included among those is the use of inappropriate tools, culture clashes, inadequate instruction for CLD students, and teachers' perceptual bias of CLD students' capacities and achievement (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Haas and Brown, 2019; Chamberlain, 2005).

Research has indicated that student ability and achievement as perceived by teachers can be impacted by student race and/or ethnicity (Minor, 2014; Greenfield, 2013; Peterson et al., 2016; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Studies have also shown that teachers tend to favor and have more positive referrals (to gifted programs) for European American or White students, and more negative referrals (for a disability) in tandem with less favorable attitudes towards students of color and English language learners (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). This has been demonstrated through multiple studies utilizing techniques that look at implicit and explicit bias (Glock & Kovacs, 2013; Greenfield, 2013; Peterson et al., 2016). For example, participants presented with results from their responses, often demonstrate disbelief or disregard for the findings indicative of bias (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014). Particularly when those results suggest a preference for White/European American students over minority students. This indicates a lack of teachers' awareness or acknowledgment of beliefs or attitudes towards certain students.

Implicit bias is likely a predictor of teacher behavior, less disputedly an indication of inherent beliefs (Glock & Kovacs, 2013). To investigate teacher perceptions' of CLD students during a general education intervention process, it is imperative to explore dialogues that occur within those processes, and delve deeper into the meaning behind the perceptions and statements or beliefs held.

Meaning Perspectives

Epistemology is the study of knowledge, which includes what individuals believe it means to be educated, smart, struggling, and academically successful (Zamudio et al., 2011). An individual's epistemological orientation develops based upon their experience, background (race, gender, class), and life.

Mezirow's idea of meaning perspectives provides insight to the origination of assumptions/bias/perceptions that may factor in disproportional referral of CLD students for special education. Mezirow defines meaning perspectives as the "frame of reference" (created from habitual expectations) that is used to create one's belief system to interpret and evaluate experiences (1991). The habitual experiences, or "habits of mind," used by Mezirow (1991), also reflect and are reflected by an individual's behavior. This includes how they conduct themselves, how they feel, and how the individual things, which is heavily influenced by "codes." The codes can be impacted by culture, society, education, the economy, political, and/or psychological, but often "mirror the way our culture and those individuals responsible for our socialization happen to have defined various situations," (Mezirow, 1991, p. 131). Unlike Mezirow's "points of view," habits of mind are more ingrained within a person and harder to change or adapt (Mezirow, 1997).

Mezirow's sociolinguistic meaning perspective accounts for numerous factors that can lead to shaping or limiting one's perspective. An individual's social norms/roles, ethnocentrism, prototypes/scripts, philosophies, cultural/language codes, language, and secondary socialization are all influences that can contribute to their sociolinguistic meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1991; Wessels et al., 2011).

Mezirow (1991) discusses how individuals' meaning perspectives are defined and formed by those guiding/responsible for socialization, and by an individual's culture. The impact of parent perspectives, biographies, social status, etc., all influence one's concept of reality and "how things should be." These influences/factors are then internalized, forming their meaning perspectives or "habits of mind," (Mezirow, 1991). Such beliefs or ideologies can range from "sophisticated theory to blind prejudices, or biases such as racism, sexism, and chauvinistic

nationalism," (Mezirow, 1991, p. 131). Meaning perspectives account for how individuals act, interpret, and think about society and their beliefs. This is heavily influenced by one's primary socialization and can be difficult to change.

Consideration of the impacts of meaning perspectives on individual behavior and thought processes underscored the need to investigate those held by teachers related to CLD students. Specifically, what meaning perspectives are held by general education teachers as they influence discussion surrounding CLD students during a GEI process? The potential to identify and then utilize approaches to impact true transformative learning with educators has far-reaching implications. Reduction of CLD students' disproportionate referrals to, and placement in special education is one crucial impact. Research regarding disproportionality is often present within the field of special education but is lacking consideration of the role general education teachers and practices take within this topic (Waitoller et al., 2010). This research begins to bridge the gap between the discussion of disproportionality and the area of general education.

As previously discussed, disproportional representation of CLD students in special education is widely documented, and has been for years (Cabral, 2008; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Sullivan, 2011). Much of the research discusses factors leading to disproportionality (inappropriate referrals and evaluations, inadequate instruction) (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Whittaker & Ortiz, 2019) and attempts to remedy the issue through policy and practice (Bradley et al., 2007). While RtI was created in an effort to positively impact disproportionate representation and falls within general education (Enrique et al., 2013; NCRTI, 2010), a majority of research and discussion about disproportionality lies in the field of special education.

The research on implicit bias investigated for this study focused on the beliefs and actions of classroom (general education) teachers towards CLD students (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014;

Greenfield, 2013; Peterson et al., 2016). While the research on implicit bias did make mention of referrals for special education evaluations, a majority dealt with perspectives on student academic success, family, and behavior (Greenfield, 2013; Minor, 2014; Peterson et al., 2016; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). The idea of implicit bias and disproportionate representation was not specifically targeted in the research reviewed.

This study, utilized principles of both storytelling and colorblindness, along with meaning perspectives, to investigate the language used by teachers to describe instructional practices and precepts during referral of CLD students for general education interventions. This study is unique in its use of a critical lens to analyze language and actions used by general education teachers with CLD students. The analysis brings to light beliefs, or thoughts, of teachers that may be attributed to their meaning perspectives. Individual's perspectives, as discussed, are influenced and created from our interactions with the world and communities in which we live (Mezirow, 1991). Similarly, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) and Ladson-Billings (1998) claim that race and racism is socially constructed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Implicit bias is known to predict behavior and often lies in one's subconscious (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014; Glock & Kovacs, 2013). This makes it difficult to critically reflect upon actions, thoughts, and beliefs as both implicit bias and meaning perspectives are deeply ingrained as well as concealed or hidden from the individual (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014; Glock & Kovacs, 2013; Mezirow, 1991).

Investigating general education teachers' perspectives of CLD students through their stated language explored the impact of general education on the issue of disproportionality. This alone has far reaching implications for the education system, instruction, teachers, and most importantly the future of CLD students. Additionally, use of storytelling, colorblindness, and

meaning perspectives as a foundation for the discussion of teacher perceptions is essential to increase awareness, acknowledgement, and attention to these critical insights during professional development for pre-service/inservice teachers.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Yazan (2015) describes Merriam's epistemological background as the belief that one's reality is not pre-determined, rather constructed upon interactions within the individual's social world. Using this approach and epistemic background, the researcher attempted to gain insight to classroom teachers' construction and make meaning of experiences with CLD students (Yazan, 2015). The idea that knowledge is socially constructed rather than pre-determined is also presented within descriptions of Alcoff's theory of perception and Mezirow's meaning perspectives. The investigation of teachers' perspectives (understanding and meaning-making) of CLD students was the focus of this research. A case study methodology was utilized to explore these perspectives through multiple sources of data.

This chapter describes the methods of data collection and analysis used to address the research questions. Discussion within this chapter includes the following: (1) pilot study findings (2) restatement of research questions, (3) site and participant selection information, (4) explanation of the methods and tools used for the collection of data, (5) the process for analyzing the data, (6) information regarding the trustworthiness of the study, and (7) assurances of the protection of human subjects.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted which reviewed the site's Individual Problem-Solving Process (IPSP) forms for students over the past three academic years, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021. These documents fall within the document form review method of the larger study and are part of the general education intervention (GEI) process for the district. The pilot study was conducted to gain insight to teacher/team consideration of CLD students' biopsychosocial histories during the GEI process.

Originally, the intent of this pilot was to analyze the documents as they related to the following research questions:

1. What data are important and determined to be relevant for referrals?
2. What is the language used to describe student strengths and weaknesses?
3. How do interventions align with areas of concerns?
4. What language is used to describe students' biopsychosocial histories?

Upon receipt of the data from the district and initial review of several forms, it became apparent that the research questions needed to be pared down and revised. The reason for revision was the lack of information related to interventions, and the minimal number of forms that discussed the cultural and/or linguistic diversity, or biopsychosocial history of the students. Instead, the information gathered focused on the data deemed important and relevant for referral to the intensive general education intervention process. The new targeted focus of the pilot study included responding to the following revised research questions:

1. What data are important and determined relevant for referrals?
2. What ways is cultural-linguistic diversity considered in development and provision of general education interventions?

Pilot Study Methods

The data for the pilot study was provided in an Excel spreadsheet, which included numerous areas from the Individual Problem-Solving Process (IPSP) form. The IPSP is the general education intervention process for the study site. The data was unfiltered and contained any and all students for whom an IPSP form had been created during the past three academic years. The researchers then set two criteria to determine whether the form would be included based on the focus of the research study. The two criteria that needed to be met were whether the

student was marked as receiving ESOL services, and/or if the home language listed was one other than English. This narrowed the number of forms from 95 to 42 analysis within this study.

It was then determined that multiple sections of information were not necessary for providing the information needed for the scope of this study. Therefore, several sections were deleted from the spreadsheet. With each modification of the original spreadsheet, a copy was made. This enabled the researchers to track modifications and go back to the original data if desired.

The following sections were deleted prior to analysis: 1) School entry date, 2) Vision screen date, 3) Hearing screen date, and 4) The checkbox for all areas such as Math, Reading, Social Skills. The checkboxes that were deleted did not have data, either qualitative or quantitative, it was only a field with a mark which was not needed. Each form was then given a numeric number not associated with the actual student. This number provided a basis for reference to specific forms throughout the study. The modified file was then imported to Nvivo for analysis. Nvivo software was used to organize the files and how the information was coded.

In total, the number of IPSP forms for the last three academic years at the research site totaled 95. Of these 95 forms, 43 pertained to female students, 52 pertained to male students. Of these, 42 met the stated criteria for inclusion in this study.

Pilot Study Findings

As previously stated, the focus of the study changed upon review of the forms. It became clear that the original focus of the study delved deeper than the information the forms provided. While the in-depth qualitative data sought was not obtained, quantitative data and language yielded a wealth of information related to CLD students, the IPSP, and teacher considerations. Areas of potential relevance dealt with family life/parent perspective, student interests, and

whether mention of the student's cultural and linguistic diversity was discussed or factored into focus areas of the form.

Family life/Parent Perspective

Of the 42 forms which met criteria for focus on a CLD student, 29 had some commentary in the designated field, but 13 of the forms had nothing written or included for this area. Of the 29 that acknowledged this required field only 6 provided information from the Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP), and 7 limited statements to 1-2 sentences. These sentences typically contained only *superficial* information such as 'student lives with parent', or what language was spoken at home.

Interestingly, few entries written in the parent perspective section noted that a parent was not 100% in agreement with, the school or teacher concern. Entries that did reference a parent comment in accordance with teacher concern commonly stated that parent was in agreement, or wanted to do 'whatever was needed for their child.'

When agreement was not perceived by the teacher, the entry had more of a negative tone. For example, "When mom has been contacted about academic concerns, she quickly changes the subject and says, 'OK,'" indicating the teacher perception, but not necessarily parent's perspective related to her own child. Further in this entry, the teacher stated "She did not have time to come in for parent teacher conferences and we had to hold a phone conference." Put together, these two comments provide context needed to understand the teacher's perception. By the use of phrases such as "quickly changes the subject," and "did not have time to come in," the type of behavior expected or *privileged* by this school or teacher becomes clear. Gee's Sign Systems and Knowledge tool deals with individual's assumptions that can be identified through

the analysis of discourse (Gee, 2014). Additionally, the Connections tool (Gee, 2014) explains how information is connected by individuals and interpreted through their lens.

Educational assumptions were revealed via analysis of comments written in the family life/parent perspective section of the IPSP form. In reference to conversations with a parent about a student, one teacher stated, "However, it seems really hard for her (parent) to understand educational expectations….. She (parent) frequently says she understands but then asks multiple questions about the same topic." Assumptions suggested by these comments include the parent's perceived lack of capacity to understand expectations, as well as the assumption that everyone has the same expectations. In contrast, statements such as "[Student]'s father is incredibly supportive of the school," and "He only wants the best for his children and fully supports the school. He is very appreciative," reflect teacher description that highlight preferred, or *privileged* behavior from parents. In fact, the use of words such as *incredibly*, *fully,* and *appreciative* paired with *support* suggest linkages between the preferred or privileged types of response and the teacher's perception of parent support. The Connections tool (Gee, 2014) may also be useful to analyze the interpretation made by the teacher about the parent's view of education.

CLD…what's that?

Chief among the intended outcomes of RtI discussed, was the need for culturally relevant/responsive instruction as foundational for students that are CLD (NCRTI, 2010). Purposeful consideration of the impacts of student biographies (i.e. diversity, language, individual assets), and instructional factors that can influence CLD student performance is crucial for creating the conditions needed for academic success (Herrera, 2010). It is therefore important to analyze the language used to describe CLD students and data deemed relevant.

To restate, the two criteria used for inclusion in this study were demographic indicators that the student received ESOL services at school and use of a language other than English in the home. Determination of forms to include however revealed a discrepancy in the demographic information used to describe students. For example, 15 of the 42 documents listed the child as receiving ESOL services, with the home language marked as English. Of the remainder, 4 documents listed a home language other than English, but stated student did not receive ESOL services. All other referral documents indicated that the student did receive ESOL services and a language other than English was used within the home.

At a minimum, discussions related to consideration of a student being CLD would be expected to be present within the forms analyzed. It would be expected as each of these students were included because they met the criteria for a CLD student, and the interventions selected had accommodated instruction prior to consideration of special education need. In fact, 22 of the 42 forms had no mention of anything related to the student being culturally or linguistically diverse *anywhere* on the form. Of the 20 forms that made some mention of the student being CLD, only 4 contained mention of ESOL status or support, with only 6 of the 20 indicating consultation with the speech-language pathologist (SLP). In sum, there was little indication of appropriately accommodated instruction prior to referral for special education.

Interestingly, and potentially worthy of further study, it was the SLP that consistently made reference to the student as culturally or linguistically diverse, with possible impacts upon the communication in the classroom settings. In this district, SLPs have and do participate in numerous professional developments to increase their knowledge around issues related to speech and language and CLD students. However, the SLP was not consistently involved in the discussion of these students, even when language or comprehension concerns were present.

Often, the only information provided about the student related to quantitative (static) data generated by *universal* academic screeners.

In one instance, a student, who received enrichment (grade level +) interventions, was noted to be linguistic diverse. However, this was presented in the form as therefore dismissive of need to consider diversity. The staff member stated that the student should be "…..looked at for strengths and possible enrichment reasons only. ESOL will not necessarily be needed for this process." Why not? This statement gives the sense that only students with concerns in academics or behavior should have their diversity (i.e. ESOL) considered. However, analysis of the forms did not show this to occur either.

Student Interests

The IPSP forms indicate areas such as Student Strengths and Interests, Student Strengths for each domain: Math, Receptive Language, Expressive Language, etc., that directly relate to description of the student's interests/assets and how those were utilized to facilitate student success. Analysis of the forms indicated that a majority of the forms either had nothing listed in the indicated boxes (14/42), or listed only strengths related to school, or the school setting (12/42). For example, "[Student] has strengths is reading fluency/accuracy, math computation, and application and problem solving," or comments related to the subjects that the student enjoyed at school. BDI states that a child is not just what is seen during the school day. It is instead imperative to gain knowledge of, in order to contextualize school perceptions of 'evidence' within, biopsychosocial history of the individual student (Herrera, 2010). If common practice is to leave the area blank, or only think in terms of the school setting, how is the whole student being considered or problem-solved to aid in success?

More detailed information was provided when participants described ways in which students' strengths were used to facilitate their success, however the majority of strengths listed described environmental structures as opposed to instructional adjustments. Many times, 'small groups' and 'preferential seating' were listed in this area as student's *strengths*. On 17 of the 42 forms analyzed, the field for strengths was left completely blank. Additionally, 1 form described student needs instead of strengths, and 2 had something other than strengths listed in this field.

Pilot Study Summary

Overall, the pilot study highlighted the degree to which teams considered cultural and linguistic diversity when problem solving within general education. More often than not, there was little or no mention of a student being CLD. The data provided on the forms was overwhelmingly quantitative data from universal screeners or progress monitoring. The preponderance of quantitative data provided the impression that this represents the type of information privileged or considered important. This is interesting as much research discusses the biases and issues with validity and reliability with CLD students (Abedi, 2008; Abedi & Faltis, 2015; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). Additionally, the ability or inclination to understand a child from a biopsychosocial standpoint is almost non-existent. In a sense, the student has been reduced to who they appear to be during the school day. This is further evidenced by the lack of parent and family perspective, and examples of language used to describe parent's perspectives.

Numerous limitations were present in this study. Those included lack of entry and exit dates of the forms, potential missing intervention data, the criteria used for selecting forms, as well as the revision of research questions based on available data. While missing intervention data was a limitation, it likely did not impact findings as this data was not analyzed in-depth for this study. The findings from this pilot study provided a basis for deepened exploration into the

language used by teachers when describing CLD students, the information deemed important, and the perspectives of teachers revealed during referral of CLD students for the most intensive GEI process in this district.

Research Question

Disproportionality in special education for CLD students persists within our education system (Cabral, 2008; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Sullivan, 2011), yet examination of general education teachers' influence on the decisions which may lead to placement are sparse in the literature (Waitoller et al., 2010). General education teachers are active participants in the referral process. Therefore examination of those teachers' perspectives is key to resolution of over/underrepresentation of CLD students in special education. This qualitative study sought to gain greater insight into these perspectives through a meaning perspectives framework, enhanced by principles of storytelling and colorblindness. A single research question was posed to allow for emergence of relevant themes.

1. In what ways do general education teachers describe their teaching of and factors they consider in, the GEI process for CLD Students?

Site and Participant Selection

This study was conducted in a large, urban Midwestern school district where trend data demonstrates increased enrollment of CLD students, with an increase in referrals for speech and language evaluations for CLD students. In the school year prior to this study, the district was made up of over 48,000 enrolled students. Of those students, approximately 31.05% identified as White, with the next largest group identifying as Hispanic/Latino(a) at 35.69%, and 17.07% of the overall students identified as students with disabilities (SWDs). The overall enrollment of the district has steadily decreased since the 2017-2018 school year, when enrollment was over

49,000 students. Conversely, the overall number of students with disabilities has steadily increased since the 2017-2018 school year. In 2017, there were approximately 7,065 SWDs (15.73% of population), and during the 2020-2021 school year, there were approximately 7,628 SWDs (17.07% of the population).

The particular site selected for this study was an elementary school in the district described. The school had grade levels from Pre-Kindergarten through the fifth grade, with an enrollment of over 600 students each year. A majority of the students in this school identified as Non-White (82.13%). Further breakdown showed 54.85% of the students as Hispanic, 12.88% as African-American, 8.45% as Asian, and 5.4% as Multi-Race. The number of students listed as English Language Learners (ELL) was 36.15%, with 16.07% SWDs at the time of this study. Of the SWDs, approximately 8.03% of those students were Hispanic, 4.99% were White, 1.66% were listed as African-American, and .69% were either Asian, or listed as Multi-Race. ELL students account for 6.65% of SWDs. Additionally, this site provided English as a Second Language (ESOL) services, housed a Newcomer's program, and two self-contained, special education classrooms for students deemed to benefit from more intensive settings during the majority of each day.

As illustrated by the demographics above, the site selected had a large number of students that included a high number of CLD students. The higher number of CLD students enrolled at this school allowed for a larger sample size. Furthermore, the teachers employed at the site might have been familiar with, and accustomed to culturally responsive instructional strategies. This school was also the site of the pilot study, and as such actively engaged in the general education intervention process, a necessity for this study.

The participants of this study were general education teachers involved in the Individual Problem-Solving Process for at least one of their students, also identified as culturally and linguistically diverse. The participants were responsible for provision of culturally appropriate instruction for their CLD students in all settings. The sampling of the participants was purposeful, since it included only teachers instructing a CLD student they perceived to be academically or behaviorally struggling.

Study Methods

As previously stated, Horkheimer (as cited by Sullivan & Tuana, 2007) does not believe that empirical data alone can be relied upon to provide a foundation for understanding social activity or knowledge. Deeper insight to the study question, was however deemed accessible through qualitative research. Such methods were employed to "understand, interrogate, and deconstruct" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 19) general education teachers' descriptions of instruction, achievement, and factors they consider, in the GEI process for CLD students. Numerous methodologies exist within qualitative research, each with its particular methods for gathering data based on the lens, or framework, required for investigation of the phenomena (Miles et al., 2014). Miles et al. (2014, p. 45) describe case studies as "vivid and illuminating," especially if critical in nature. Therefore, a case study methodology was utilized for this study.

According to Bhattacharya (2017), case studies are utilized to answer questions in an in-depth manner. Case studies can be completed in various timeframes allow for completion in relatively short periods of time (Bhattacharya, 2017). The methodology used for a research study should align with the theoretical framework, to maintain elements of rigor within qualitative research (Bhattacharya, 2017). Case studies have been defined in numerous ways, depending upon the researcher. Merriam's (1998) definition of case study was utilized for this study.

According to Yazan (2015) and Bhattacharya (2017), Merriam defines a case study as characterized by greater flexibility with regard to what can constitute a "case." Merriam claims that if a researcher can identify a phenomenon and set "boundaries" for what they plan to research or investigate, then the researcher can call it a "case," applicable to case study methodology (Merriam, 1998).

The research focus of this study explored general education teachers' perceptions of CLD students through a meaning perspectives framework. The discourse used by teachers to talk and write about CLD students was examined through critical discourse analysis (CDA). Critical discourse analysis investigates the role of power, dominance, and how that is reproduced through discourse (Van Dijk, 1993). Gee (2011) provides further information on the three "tasks" utilized within CDA. Similar to discourse analysis, CDA examines the text (words, phrases, etc.) and the discourse (context, communication), or situated meaning, used during interactions. However, CDA also includes the social practices associated with the discourse (Gee, 2011). As Van Dijk (1993) described, a goal of CDA is to investigate the power structures created by discourse, with Gee (2011) providing the tasks and tools to conduct the analysis.

Data Collection Tools

The methods used within a case study to collect data are typically drawn from multiple sources (Yazan, 2015). Yazan references Merriam's use of three distinct sources of information for a case study. Those include review, or "mining," of documents, observations, and interviews (2015). This research study used the same types of source information to better understand the perspectives of teachers who had referred CLD students for the intensive GEI process.

As a case study in qualitative research lends itself to the use of multiple sources of information from which to triangulate the data, so did this study (Yazan, 2015). The three

distinct sources of information included document analysis of Individual Problem-Solving Process (IPSP) forms of CLD students (as done in the pilot study), observations of teams engaged in "problem-solving" discussions about CLD students, and semi-structured interviews with general education teachers involved in the discussions about CLD students. To reiterate, for the purposes of this study a student whose culture and/or language differs from that of the dominant group in a society was considered culturally and linguistically diverse (Herrera & Murry, 2005). This automatically included any student receiving ESOL services, but included others per criteria.

General Education Intervention Forms (IPSP forms)

The IPSP form contains individualized information on a specific student. The form was utilized or created when a staff member had concerns that the standard treatment protocol and/or instruction was not meeting the needs of the individual student. The staff member initiating the form was typically the general education teacher. The concerns might have been that the student was not making progress given the interventions and instruction, or that the inventions and instruction were not challenging or enriching for the student.

Information contained within the IPSP document provided background information, such as grade, age, schools attended in a previous or current school year, results of vision and hearing screening, the number of absences, scores obtained on benchmark and state assessments, as well as information related to classroom assessments. Additionally, the form contained spaces for observational narrative, information obtained from family and parent's perspectives, and any major health concerns. The teacher completing the form listed both strengths and weaknesses within a number of areas, including but not limited to: Math, Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Reading, Social, Attention, and Sensory Perception, among others. Further along in

the process, the team stated their "hypothesis" of the detailed concern, interventions put in place, the outcome of the interventions, and any next steps. The interventions listed also included time, frequency, and duration.

Observations

The IPSP document information was used by the designated team (refer to "teams" in the RtI section) at the school during problem-solving discussions. Study observations occurred while teams discussed the referred CLD students. Detailed notes and graphics were created by the researcher to supplement information gathered from audio recordings of the discussions. The discussions were transcribed by hand, with the help of oTranscribe software. Single letters were assigned to participants to maintain confidentiality.

Semi-structured Interviews

Participants for interviews were not selected at random but were purposefully selected based on their participation in IPSP. Purposive sampling is common within qualitative research (Miles et al., 2014). Once participants were selected, interviews took place in a neutral setting at an agreed upon date and time. The interviews were semi-structured, including specific, focused questions, but also allowed the participants to lead the interview in other directions deemed relevant to the study. Interviews were recorded and transcribed with oTranscribe, excluding identifying information.

Data Analysis Procedures

The purpose of data analysis is to make meaning or sense out of data (Yazan, 2015). The analysis of the data gathered from this research occurred in steps. Bhattacharya (2017) describes data analysis in qualitative research as the creation of processes from which to gain deep insights from all aspects of the study. Several of Gee's (2011) building task tools were the basis for

coding and analysis. Language is used for a variety of actions (requesting, questioning, commenting, etc.) (Gee, 2011). Gee (2011) discusses how these actions of language can be used to build and/or destroy things (marriages, relationships, meetings, etc.). The building task tools specifically used for analysis in this study are described below.

Politics Tool

The Politics tool outlined by Gee (2014) emphasizes neither politics nor government, but rather *social goods*. Social goods can be described as varying from group to group, with a *good* being determined by a majority of the community (Gee, 2014). Gee (2014) describes this tool as highlighting how the idea of social goods (what they are, who gets them in a society) is created through discourse. For example, discourse around membership to an exclusive country club only afforded an elite group might indicate a social good of a society. The three tasks outlined earlier allowed for in-depth analysis of the discourse related to the social goods. CDA allowed for the analysis of the discourse to reflect upon issues of power and dominance related to this tool. The Politics tool was utilized when coding IPSP forms, field notes from observations, and transcripts of semi-structured interviews for this research.

Connections Tool

Examination of discourse through use of the Connections tool enabled the researcher to focus on connections made by the speaker, author, or communicator in their discourse (Gee 2014). The ability to create connections or manipulate the message or meaning through discourse is critical for use in CDA (Gee, 2014). Examination of the connections created by teachers related to their CLD students provided insight into their perspectives of CLD students, and possibly their epistemological beliefs. The Connections tool was utilized throughout coding and analysis of data from this study.

Sign Systems and Knowledge Building Tool

The idea of "privilege" can relate to discourse as well. The Sign Systems and Knowledge Building tool focused on the ways specific types of knowledge, languages, backgrounds, etc. are privileged over others (Gee, 2014). As CDA hopes to investigate the reproduction of power and dominance, analyzation of discourse, as a means to privilege or exclude may also yield information important to this study. The use of this tool during the analysis of forms, observations, and interviews provided much needed information to describe what was privileged by teachers which may in fact, have impacted CLD students.

Analysis of IPSP Forms

This analysis was completed during the pilot study phase of this research study. Initially, all forms were reviewed to re-focus on the question(s) and information. The researcher then used inductive analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 150) to begin sorting the information gathered from IPSP forms into meaningful units, or codes. Analysis of meaningful units through the theoretical framework, and construction of task tools outlined previously, lead to the data being separated further into categories, and subsequent emergence of themes (Bhattacharya, 2017). Commentary related to teachers' perspectives of student, as well as other significant data from the forms, were gathered using the above process.

Analysis of Field Notes

The audio recordings of the field notes from observations were uploaded onto the researcher's secure computer and transcribed by hand using oTranscribe software. Single letters, assigned randomly, were used to maintain confidentiality. The transcriptions were read through and uploaded into Nvivo software for further analysis. Employment of Gee's (2014) building

tools, enabled the transcriptions to be coded, then analyzed and marked in relation to the research question or additional emergent themes.

Analysis of Semi-structured Interviews

Similar to the analysis of the field notes, audio recordings of the interviews were uploaded onto a computer. oTranscribe software was accessed to support the transcription by hand. From this point, the analysis mirrored that of the field notes, including the use of the Nvivo software and the building tools used for analysis.

The data pulled from the sources of information was then placed side by side, with an eye to emergent or identifying themes. Through the process of data analysis outlined by Bhattacharya (2017), the codes broadened to categories, and allowed for emergent themes. Themes and categories gathered were reviewed multiple times to increase validity. Additionally, a fellow researcher familiar with the principles of storytelling, colorblindness, and CDA was consulted to review the codes based on the tools and research question. The review of coding by two separate individuals increased the reliability and validity of the results.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Similar to quantitative research, qualitative researchers aim for a standard or criteria of research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By the nature of qualitative research, the criteria used to determine a standard, or rigor and trustworthiness, differ from that commonly discussed in quantitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Several strategies are used by qualitative researchers to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The following strategies were used in this research study.

Triangulation

The use of multiple data sources can provide corroboration of the collected information into themes and categories (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This study used document analysis (record review), observations, and semi-structured interviews. Through the use of the above data sources, triangulation was achieved, increasing validity and reliability of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Researcher Reflexivity

The self-disclosure of biases, values, and beliefs of the researcher as it relates to the study is another example of what it means to create, or increase, the validity of a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Reflexivity allows the researcher to disclose his/her/their position, creating transparency for the reader. In this study, a statement of subjectivity was included by the researcher.

Audit Trail

Creswell and Miller (2000) use the procedure of an "audit trail" to establish trustworthiness within a study. The audit described by Creswell and Miller (2000) involved an individual outside of the study reviewing the procedures and documentation. In this study, an outside individual with numerous years of experience within the areas of special education and speech-language pathology was consulted as an auditor of this project. Additionally, detailed descriptions of the methods and procedures used are given in the following chapters (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Peer debriefing

Peer debriefing, or peer review, involves engagement with an individual who has knowledge, or familiarity, with the area of research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The peer will interact and collaborate with the researcher while reviewing all

aspects of the study. Consultation with a peer to debrief throughout added credibility to the study.

Rich, Thick Descriptions

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) discuss the need for rich, thick descriptions of the study, with regard to participants, site, environment, etc. Rich descriptions allow the reader enough information to determine how the research context is similar to another context, thereby increasing transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study strove to provide such rich, thick descriptions through the detailed demographic information of both district and site, the participants, and all the sites where the research was conducted.

Protection of Human Subjects

Following approval from the doctoral supervisory committee, required materials were submitted to the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research Involving Human Subjects. Additionally, the study was submitted to the research committee of the organization where the research site resides for approval. Any and all methods of collecting data were not initiated until approval was obtained from the IRB and the research committee. Informed consent, both written and verbal, was obtained from all participants in the study. The participants were assured that any information provided by them would be reported as a group, and not identified or identifiable to a specific person.

Summary

This chapter detailed the research design chosen to gather information deemed necessary to inform the field in areas addressed by the research question:

1. In what ways do general education teachers describe their teaching of, and factors they consider in, the GEI process for CLD Students?

Detailed descriptions of the site and participant selection were provided. This chapter outlined the methods used to collect and analyze the data to allow for a rich, thick description of the study. Finally, the chapter discussed the need for trustworthiness in qualitative research and explained the strategies employed by this study to achieve this goal. The findings and outcomes through the analysis of the data are discussed in Chapter Four.

Chapter 4 - Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

An individual's meaning perspectives can influence their actions and beliefs, forming a certain lens through which every experience is then perceived (Mezirow, 1991). Studies have also explored implicit bias, and its connection to predicting behavior (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014; Glock & Kovacs, 2013). The impact of an individual's meaning perspectives and implicit biases, coupled with a decades long disproportionality issue for CLD students warrants deeper insight to the perspective of teachers towards CLD students in education.

Investigation of the language used by general education (GE) teachers when describing a general education intervention process with respect to CLD students has the potential to highlight themes relevant to the education of CLD students. Any themes that emerge may lead to increased, and more targeted professional development, in addition to crucial information for pre-service programs.

This chapter analyzes the data, describes the findings, and provides discussion of the findings obtained from observations and semi-structured interviews conducted with GE teachers involved in a GEI process for CLD students. Additionally, information obtained from the records review completed during the pilot study (discussed in chapter three) will be embedded within the discussion. All data sources provided useful information that was used to address the researcher's question:

1. In what ways do general education teachers describe their teaching of and factors they consider in, the GEI process for CLD Students?

Findings and Discussion from Analysis of IPSP Forms (Pilot Study)

In summary, the findings from the pilot study, which analyzed the Individual Problem Solving Process (IPSP) forms of CLD students found that the data deemed important, or

"privileged," was quantitative in nature, and based off of static assessments. The study also found that little consideration was given to understanding the child from a biopsychosocial standpoint and how this may factor into student engagement with class instruction and material. Study findings also revealed limited information regarding the family's perspective and minimal acknowledgement of a student being culturally and linguistically diverse. The findings from this pilot study sparked the desire to explore the perspective of GE teachers' on a general education intervention process for CLD students.

Findings and Discussion from Analysis of Field Notes

As previously stated, one source of data obtained were observations of IPSP meetings. Due to a number of unforeseen factors (e.g. snow days for inclement weather, COVID quarantines) only one IPSP meeting was able to be observed. The meeting took place in one of the participant's classrooms. Present were teachers from the same grade level, an instructional coach, as well as other support staff (e.g. members of the Child Study Team, ESOL teacher). The observation of this meeting lasted approximately one hour. The intent of this type of meeting was to discuss students currently in the Individual Problem-Solving Process, brainstorm any interventions, accommodations, instructional modifications, along with other factors that may be impacting student performance, and to discuss other students that a teacher/team felt should be in this process.

Findings and Discussion: Family/Parent Role

Getting to know a student outside of school, which includes her/his/their culture, community, and family is a big piece of the biopsychosocial history of that student (Herrera, 2010). Understanding each student's background, or biography, is a critical component of quality instruction (Montalvo et al., 2014). One impact on the instruction of CLD students has been a

lack of understanding for students' prior knowledge, their customs, and language (Montalvo et al., 2014). It is therefore important to consider family life and parent perspective when discussing a student for which there are either academic or behavioral concerns. The IPSP forms used in this district actually do have a designated area for this information to be discussed. However, findings from the pilot study reveal that this information is often omitted from the forms, despite mention of families and parents during the IPSP meeting.

While there was not requested documentation on the IPSP forms of discussing or considering family and parent perspective, the observation did reveal that staff members did discuss student's parents and home life. This is interesting as there is a designated area on the IPSP form for family and parent perspectives to be considered during the intervention phase. Many of the discussions related to life outside of school revolved around teacher frustrations on what was or was not occurring, as told by them. For example, during a discussion of a student's attendance, one staff member present relayed that calls were made to the grandmother with whom the child resides, but that there was always an excuse given by the grandmother. Another time the statement was made by that staff member that grandmother was just "not bothering" to bring the student to school. Additionally, there was a question about this student's medication, to which one person in attendance wondered if the grandmother was *exaggerating* the child's behavior to the doctor in order to get medication. Despite the negative comments, the issue of attendance for this child was considered as being a factor in his academic concerns. Therefore, some consideration on the impact of outside factors. For this particular student, his life outside of school was considered, but most of the time comments and judgments were made related to what they (staff) felt *should be done*, or *was not being done* by the parent(s).

During the discussions of other students already in the process, or that teachers wanted in the process, there appeared an expectation, or assumption, given to family/parent lifestyles. For instance, the unwillingness (as perceived by teachers) of a parent to enter the school was due to her "activities the night before." At another point of the meeting, but regarding this same student, a staff member stated "if you don't want to be bothered by your children, then why wouldn't you send them to school?" in response to discussion about the child's lack of attendance. Two other examples during these observations dealt with discussing the family tree of a student, noting that siblings must be from different fathers, and a judgment made about parent, "it's more of a take the video game away…think it's a parenting thing." Through these examples, there is a clear privilege given by the staff members for certain lifestyles. Based on the statements made, many of the parents/families discussed did not meet these privilege criteria.

While there was some consideration of how external factors could be contributing to student performance discussion was typically devoid of brainstorming solutions. Examining external factors and how they may be attributed to performance rather than focusing on supposed intrinsic factors is a part of an RtI model (Enrique et al., 2013). Often, the extrinsic factors were proffered as explanations for student concerns. For example, one time a staff member mentioned offering rides to a guardian to help bring the child to school, but outside of this, the conversations appeared to place judgment on the child's family life, while also ascribing deficit to the child.

Findings and Discussion: Qualitative vs. Quantitative

Students with both academic and behavioral concerns were discussed during the observed meeting. Staff would often highlight the "data" they had kept on the students in the process, or for those they wanted put in the process. Similar to pilot study findings, a majority of the data

mentioned for students with academic concerns related to quantitative data, while those with behavioral concerns were described using more qualitative data. Additionally, one of the intended outcomes of IPSP meetings is the brainstorming of new, individualized ways (interventions, strategies, accommodations, modifications) to present material for increased student participation, and success. The suggestion of new instructional methods was instead, only incidentally posed.

Gee (2014) has identified a building tool titled, Sign Systems and Knowledge, used to analyze language used to build, or create, which information is privileged. Using this tool, the sources of data, or type of information deemed important to determine one's proficiency or comprehension of academic material, within this meeting was primarily based upon quantitative data from static assessments and progress monitoring probes. Much of the discussion during the meeting was descriptive, or qualitative, when discussing family life or behaviors, but omitted from discussion of student knowledge or as insight to instructional change. For example, for each student, there was discussion of the number of letters and sounds that could be identified, or the regression of such knowledge that took place. A few instances of qualitative information about a child was given as the child "gets along with everyone," and that she can "give some information when given choices." For another student the information given was that the class was not having to evacuate, but the student's behavior does get in the way of academics. The statement regarding a child being able to give information when given choices was stated, but there was not follow up describing or brainstorming how this could be utilized throughout the day. Outside of the quantitative data, information provided mainly described the parents and/or family of the child, or the child's behavior and teacher frustration.

Qualitative data has the capacity to reveal in-depth information for understanding social activity or knowledge (Bhattacharya, 2017; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007). In fact, Collins (2011) restated claims by Kress which addressed the idea that much of our learning comes from outside of the school setting. Kress further reiterated, as stated by Collins, that much of what is learned is not included, nor able to be tested by standardized assessments (Collins, 2011). Therefore, while qualitative data was presented during this IPSP meeting, it was neither offered, nor interpreted, as relevant to the knowledge base of the students. Quantitative data from assessments and marketed probes was the preeminent source of data. The qualitative data reported was not used to further understanding of student's knowledge, capacity to learn, or how to help a student reach success, rather it was to describe the negative behaviors of the student, or comments on the student's family.

Findings and Discussion: Who is the child?

In the previous sections, there were discussions surrounding the inclusion of family and parent life and perspective. This is an important piece of understanding the biopsychosocial aspect of a child (Herrera, 2010). The biopsychosocial piece is crucial when understanding the idea of storytelling. This (storytelling) allows for contextualization of any "data," and can counteract deficit perspectives observed within education (Annamma 2015; Goessling, 2018; Moyer et al., 2020). Storytelling may also reveal crucial information related to the student's knowledge unavailable via reliance on tests that reduce student competence to a number, and have been shown to be inherently biased (Abedi, 2008; Abedi & Faltis, 2015; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). Therefore understanding a student's story would increase a teacher's understanding of the child, the knowledge they bring, acknowledgement of the student's culture and history, as well as adding to the data narrative instead of solely relying on numbers. Having

this information has the potential to lead to more informed, educated decision making regarding student progress and performance.

Considering the need for student storytelling, the field notes from the IPSP meeting were further analyzed through this lens. Any "storytelling" documented during this meeting came from the perspective of the teacher. The student's story was often reduced to discussion over his/her/their family and life situation through the lens of the teacher, versus that of the family. There was no indication of the student's perspective or story as told by the student. As an example, one teacher stated, "manipulation going on….doesn't like that I don't give in." This comment appears to reflect the teacher's lens, funneled through her own meaning perspectives. In this case, there were only two other comments that could be seen as part of a student's story, but again not told by them. Those comments were: "gets along with everyone," and "…aware that doesn't understand." Storytelling is important for understanding and contextualizing what is seen in the classroom setting, and considered to be needed at the forefront of any school curriculum (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Analysis of field notes suggests the emergence of consideration of the child's life outside of school, albeit via the teacher's meaning perspective, evidenced by the assumptions and espoused expectations of family.

In summary, a few themes were apparent during the observation of the IPSP meeting. The themes included: family/parent role, qualitative vs. quantitative, and who is the child? From the analysis there is a preference for, if not reliance upon, quantitative data when determining student knowledge and capacity to learn. While qualitative data was reported during the meeting, it was often in a negative light, or not used to problem-solve for student success. Additionally, participants began to discuss the child and his/her/their story, but it was told through the lens of the teacher rather than heard from the student. The impact of individuals' meaning perspectives

is seen through the discussions related to the student's character, feelings, and family. The privilege given to certain data and lack of storytelling reinforces the majoritarian views often seen as objective and truthful (Goessling, 2018).

Findings and Discussion from Semi-Structured Interviews

Description of Participants

The participants for the interview portion of this study were not selected at random. Individuals were contacted based on their involvement with cases from the pilot study. The pilot study involved analysis of IPSP forms of students in the process due to academic or behavioral concerns. From the pilot study data, three cases were chosen for students in primary grades. The cases chosen for whom a majority of the form had been completed. Cases from primary grades were chosen to reduce the chances that the student no longer attended the pilot study site. The current teachers of the students in the cases were contacted, as well as the referring teachers from the previous school year.

A total of five teachers were contacted seeking their participation in the study. One referring teacher for a selected case no longer worked at the site. All five teachers agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study. The five teachers had a combined experience of over twenty years as certified classroom teachers. Several had prior experience working within education in a position other than classroom teacher. All participants had been a teacher at the site for at least one year. The interviews took place at the time of the participant's choosing both in-person, and through a virtual platform. Interview questions related to IPSP, IPSP process for CLD students, and any frustrations or advice for future use. The structure did allow for the interviewer to explore additional avenues based upon participant responses. Interestingly, four of the five participants had obtained their English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

endorsement. An ESOL endorsement is an 'add-on' to a teaching license requiring either completion of an approved program and passing a content assessment, or passing the content assessment (Kansas, 2021).

The study site has on average as ELL population of over two hundred students each year (Elementary Dashboard, 2022). Students that fall within this category would also be considered culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) per the definition used for this study (Herrera & Murry, 2005). However, students outside of those identified as ELL students can also be considered CLD. For the purpose of this study, pilot study cases (forms) selected for review, and then cases selected for this study, either had the student listed as receiving ESOL services, or had a language other than English listed as the home language.

Study participants have experience teaching ELL students as evidenced by the majority of the participants having obtained their ESOL endorsement, as well as the demographics of the site, and the number of years teaching at the selection site. This is important as one of the components of an RtI system is the provision of culturally relevant instruction (NCRTI, 2010). Lack of teachers trained to instruct CLD students and lack of appropriate instruction that validates student backgrounds and experiences have been considered to be factors contributing to the disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education (Kovaleski et al., 2013; Montalvo et al., 2014; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2012; Rojas & Avitia, 2017).

Gee (2011) identifies capital "D" discourse as language and actions inherited from being a *member* of a group. Individuals that share similar beliefs, understand the language, and actions are often associated within this group (Gee, 2011). Members of a Discourse group, or those that understand the intricacies of a group, often know how to "talk the talk and walk the walk," (Gee, 2011, p. 37). Discourse groups can determine which information and social goods are privileged

within that group (Gee, 2014). Social goods are thus created through discourse and vary by group (Gee, 2014).

Findings and Discussion: How is the Parent/Family Viewed?

The parents/guardians are legal members, important members, of their child's education team. IDEA requires parent involvement and the consideration of parent perspective in any special education action (IDEA, 2004). The biopsychosocial history of a CLD student includes his/her/their life, culture, community, and family outside of the school setting (Herrera, 2010). Understanding a student's biopsychosocial history is tantamount to CLD students receiving adequate, appropriate instruction, and academic success (Herrera, 2010). Therefore, the parent and family of any student, especially students considered CLD, should be seen as a critical partner in a student's education, but even more so when there are concerns with student performance.

Exhibiting adherence to requirements (IDEA), each participant described how they reached out to parent(s) when concerns were present. However, teacher assumptions of parent's understanding, knowledge, and feelings of education revealed nuanced layers of presupposition. For example, each participant did describe instances when parents were very supportive of their concern. Participant Z stated "…but I feel like we're valued very much here, like parents really do appreciate what we try and do to help their kids." Participant O stated "…they're usually supportive," and participant M replied "…they're very receptive and they honestly just like wanna work with you and they trust you." Each teacher also noted that often parents did see the same concerns in the home setting. While these were the majority sentiments of the participants, the tone of comments shifted when describing parents that may not agree and the consequent assumptions made by participants.

Parents Just Don't Understand

One theme that developed through analysis of teacher remarks was the assumed lack of parental capacities to understand. Three of the participants made at least one direct statement questioning the ability of parents/families to understand their concerns. The following shows statements made by participants where doubt was placed on the parent:

> Participant M: "…and can be challenging cuz I think a lot of times parents don't understand. Of course you want to tell them all the wonderful things and they have this great little person, but it you it's also like sometimes……I've figured out that I have to be very blunt."
>
> Participant Z: "…that was the other problem with Mom, but she didn't have the concerns like she just…I don't think she honestly understood what we were trying to tell her, especially since she didn't seem to be all there whenever I met with her."
>
> Participant K: "I think they know that the child can't do it, but it's been like a little hard for them to accept. And so with that specific parent, it just took a lot of kind of coaxing, and like this is where you child is at, this is where they should be at…and sometimes they don't quite understand exactly."

Interestingly, if a parent was described as having seen the same concerns at home, they were described as being supportive, and just wanting help. For example, when describing a situation where the teacher had concerns about a particular student's performance, participant O stated:

> "I have a friend that I'm trying to get services for now, and parents like weren't (supportive). But then they were supportive with…well, what can I do at home to help

her, and so I was like well here are some sight words that you can have her do because I know she's probably not gonna be reading every single night."

This statement highlights the teacher's perception of the *parent(s) not being supportive until they were in agreement with teacher*. At another point in the interview the same participant stated:

"I've had some families that aren't supportive because they don't want them to be known as special education um, but after they've heard it (from), a teacher and a teacher and a teacher then they're finally like okay. Like what you're the fourth person that said it so let's like go ahead and do it."

Similarly, participant M described apprehension when discussing her concerns with the parent because she "didn't know how her parent would react." Participant M stated a call was made to parent through the translation service to arrange for her to come up to the school. The participant let the parent know "…it's detrimental to her, to your student's success in school you know. Please come up and have this conversation with us." The outcome as described by participant was "and then when her mom got there, you know she was very receptive. She's like yes when I work with her at home…." Again, while there was initial concern for parent's reaction, the parent was described as *receptive* after agreeing with what the teacher had said. In fact, the participant stated "Yeah, it turned out positive. I was afraid that she would reject it, but she didn't, thank god," describing a sense of relief for parent agreement.

There is the sense that the parent becomes supportive upon agreement with the classroom teacher. The discussion was never about reflection upon what was being seen as a student concern/deficit when compared to parents' opinion or perception of their child. There was no discussion of how parent's opinion was taken into consideration, or whether there was ever reflection upon instruction, the structure of the system, or tools being used. Instead, the parents

were deemed not supportive, or there was nervousness if teacher did not feel that there would be agreement with the teacher's perception.

Interviews with participants from this study revealed that these teachers made assumptions about parents' abilities to understand school concerns. If parents did not appear to agree, they were described as unsupportive, whereas if parents agreed that the child needed, or would benefit from 'help,' they were described in a more positive light. In essence, teachers perceived parents as supportive if they displayed expected actions or verbalized supportive thoughts, but if not, they were perceived as not understanding, or as not valuing education, which is discussed in the next section.

The interviews with participants from this study highlighted a common theme where assumptions were made regarding parent's level of understanding. Additionally, if parents did not appear to agree, they were not described as *supportive*, whereas if parents agreed that they were seeing the same things, or that they wanted help for their child, then they were described in a more positive light. Overall, teacher's perceived parents as supportive of them and their child if they displayed the correct actions or verbalized the correct thoughts, but if not, they were perceived as not understanding, or as not valuing education, which is discussed in the next section.

"They don't value education."

As alluded to previously, when parents and families were brought up, there were several comments about parents and families not valuing education. There was never a specific example given where a parent was quoted as stating that they did not value education, rather participant comments appeared to be about parents in general. Specifically, those parents that may not agree

or communicate in a way that aligns with teacher's perception of an individual that values education.

For example, when describing the challenges of communicating her concerns with parents, participant M states:

> "…of course you want to tell them all the wonderful things and they have this great little person, but it you know it's also hard when you have parents that don't value education. Like oh they're just in first grade….like where just like a lot of parents think like oh they just you know, have fun."

This participant had previously also described her need to be *blunt* with parents when stating her concerns and what she sees. Again, her use of language such as blunt and not understanding or valuing education provides insight into her assumptions and potential meaning perspectives related to families that may not act a certain way. In sum, the families do not have or are afforded the *social goods* needed to be considered supportive or valued regarding their child's education.

During a separate interview, another participant echoed a similar perspective when describing parents. The participant was discussing how communication of concerns with parents was done, and if parents saw the same concerns in the home setting. To this, participant T described her experience as:

> "so um I have parents that will be like okay, yes keep pushing them (student) and then um they, they understand that education is super important, then you have some that just they don't view education as a high thing so they don't care."

The statement from this participant aligns with the statement noted earlier equating parent response with 'valuing education.' The opposite is also seen. The perspective of participant T

provides the condition where if a parent wants the teacher to keep pushing the child and is "like okay yes" when confronted with concerns then they value education. When the participant then states that others do not see education as a 'high thing' it can be assumed that the condition, of being in agreement, was not met by these parents.

This subtheme was highlighted as it provides insight into teacher's perspectives of parents and families. There is alignment between *"they don't value education"* and *parents just don't understand* in that both describe and attribute value judgments, or social goods, to expected ways of acting. This presumes that there is a correct way of behaving which indicates supporting and valuing education.

When considering Mezirow's meaning perspectives (1991) and Gee's concept of social goods (Gee, 2014), the belief system and values held by individuals within the same group/organization can influence how an individual views others and their actions. In this instance, these participant's meaning perspectives attribute specific actions to demonstrate support for their child's educational experience. If there is behavior that is in contrast to the expected behavior then those individuals are seen in a different light, often with negative connotations.

Findings and Discussion: Teacher Self-Perceptions

The ONE with Knowledge

Throughout the interviews it was clear that each participant discussed her students from a place of caring. Each participant described her actions and intentions as coming from a well-meaning place. In fact, one participant began to choke up and became teary-eyed when explaining her frustration for a student not yet receiving the help needed. While the participants

self-described as caring, their perspectives on the importance of their opinion, knowledge, and decision-making also emerged.

For example, one participant, M, acknowledged the desire to relay wonderful information to parents. When describing how this participant informs parents of concerns they responded, "Of course you want to tell them all the wonderful things and they have this great little person, but it , you know, it's also sometimes…I've figured out that I have to be very blunt." While this quote was used to describe that participant's perception of parent understanding, it also demonstrates the teacher's stated desire to show caring, "…I always like to make sure they know like I care about your kid and you know, just like you do, I want what's best for your kid and they're wonderful children." Another participant, K, reiterated that when discussing concerns with parents, it was coming from "a place of um concern, and like a place of love." These statements reveal teacher perspectives on the importance of indicating caring intentions and the desire to help students with concerns.

In addition to showing 'love' for their students, teachers made statements suggesting that it was they, the teachers, who held all the *knowledge*. Yes, the teachers would have the information related to student performance in the academic setting, but is it their information and opinion that is the final one, or the determining factor?

> "You have a wonderful, amazing kid, but for me as their teacher, they're starting to struggle. And that's where it's my job to step in and say 'well, what do we need to do?' and if these interventions aren't working, then what's the next step and just kind of keep the parents in the loop,"

No comments were made regarding collaborating with parents about concerns, but rather participants stating their concerns, but rather that participant concern was all that was needed to justify or support the finding of need.

Another instance occurred when participant T discussed how students were referred for this intervention process (IPSP), “But um I had to start....I guess it was back in October when I decided that they’re not where they should be, they’re not growing where I think they should be so then I started the PSP process.” Analyzing the language used, such as “where I think they should be,” “it’s my job to step in,” and “just kind of keep the parents in the loop,” prove insightful when considering the underlying perspectives of the participants regarding the primacy placed on their information. The participant’s position as a teacher is a social good in this instance, which then allows for her information to be privileged above others.

Participant expectations, or perspectives, based on their experience within the education system and/or lived experiences were also cited as confirmatory evidence of opinions about the student. More specifically, another participant described her ability to “just know” when there were more significant concerns with a student. While experience in a field may provide great insight and knowledge related to areas of concern, such cannot be assumed as a factor of time. Interestingly, it was also this participant who described a concern with a student as not being an “ELL issue you know um cuz English was the main thing that was spoken you know with mom…like she would she only spoke English with him.” This statement indicates the teacher’s own perception of what is or is not an “ELL issue,” and assumption that what she observes reflects the child’s entire life. This indicates a lack of awareness regarding factors related to cultural and linguistic diversity, the impacts within the academic setting, and, indeed, the inadequacy of the teacher’s own lens.

Similar to participants' statements indicating the value of their information, discussions by one participant surrounding her expectations of what students/children should do provided additional evidence of perceived social goods and meaning perspectives. Participant M discussed the struggles that have occurred during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. M discussed having to go back and teach children what was felt they *should know*. At one point, M discussed "teaching them like how to speak to each other." It was stated that they "jabber" all day long, but "when we have to actually discuss like academic things and stuff like they just stare at each other."

M went on to further discuss how this is approached by saying "I'm like okay….in my thinking I'm like so I'm going to have to like treat it like they don't know how," and then proceeds to discuss how she teaches them to turn and talk to each other. Finally, M described feelings related to what has been impacted by the pandemic, but also highlighted the assumptions made, "The things you wouldn't think of that wouldn't effect….those things we take for granted you know, those like speaking to humans, like other humans."

Discussions with participants also highlight the perceptions of teachers regarding the importance of their information, status, and assumptions. The expectations and status of the participants are seen as the social goods which are then connected to the knowledge base that is privileged within this organization. The social goods and connections mentioned reference Gee's (2014) work by which he states that *social goods*, which can vary based on group, are created by individuals, and these goods connect to the knowledge or systems that are privileged and deemed important or better than. Expanding further on the idea of privileged status and information is the work of Mezirow's meaning perspectives.

An individual's behavior can be linked back to how each was socialized (Mezirow, 1991). This socialization happens from birth and is influenced by the individual's society, education, culture, community, experiences, etc. (Mezirow, 1991). It is this socialization and subsequent meaning perspectives that drive one's perception of "how things should be," (Mezirow, 1991). While each participant brought her own individual meaning perspectives based on socialization, they each also had some similar lived experiences in their education and training for their profession, as well as their employment in the same setting. Additionally, each participant has herself been within the education system since entering school at a young age. The influence of the education system, the socialization from professional training, teacher experience, and teach*ing* experiences can all impact one's beliefs and expectation for *how things should be*. In other words, whose information and knowledge is important and what families and students should know and how they should behave.

CLD Knowledge

Teacher's understanding of a student's background, and the importance of highly trained and qualified teachers for CLD students discussed previously provide context for findings in this section: 1) for instruction to be effective for CLD students, it is critical that instructors understand student's backgrounds (Montalvo et al., 2014), 2) there is a shortage of well trained teachers to instruct CLD students (Rojas & Avitia, 2017), and 3) teachers' and staff understanding of behaviors reflecting different cultural norms and experiences often lead to misguided responses (Herrera et al., 2020). The analysis of participants' discussions related to individual knowledge base was performed with the key points in mind. Participants were not specifically asked about their knowledge of instruction for CLD students, however analysis of transcripts revealed perspectives related to practice. Questions did however probe participants'

familiarity with the term CLD, interventions specific to CLD students, and how/if the process (IPSP) differed for CLD students.

Initially, participants were asked to describe their familiarity with the term culturally and linguistically diverse as it relates to students. For one participant CLD meant "…students who come from different backgrounds…..that is different from what we….you know what's average anymore but just that traditional I guess American-style setting." Another participant's response was "So those would be like our ESOL students?" While some participants mentioned CLD students as including those with varied backgrounds, during the interviews CLD students were mainly discussed by participants as ELL students or those that received ESOL services. There was acknowledgement of diversity for those ELL students, however there did not appear to be an understanding or consideration for those that may speak English, but with varying culture and linguistic backgrounds.

Interestingly, four of the five participants volunteered having an ESOL endorsement. The fifth participant did not address having an endorsement. This indicates that these teachers benefitted from additional training for teaching students that receive ESOL services, however, that was not always the acknowledged rationale: For example, participant O, stated "Uh, so that's kind of like why I decided to get ESOL certified, because then I can be counted (ESOL service minutes), and if they're with me all day long then that's helpful," and "Uh so I actually went through all of the classes to get endorsed, so um, I know a handful of stuff about it." Attainment of a certification specifically geared towards teaching ESOL students suggests that these participants would have the knowledge to provide effective instruction (a requirement of RtI).

The participants' perspectives on their knowledge and/or how they provide instruction for CLD students suggests some understanding of effective instruction, while at the same time shedding light on areas for further training and education. Participant O was the only one of two participants to mention anything related to a student's culture. O stated:

> "Like culturally, like some students don't know a lot of things, like I have to breakdown a whole lot of words for my students because they don't know what they are, and so we do a lot of differentiation that some schools probably might not have to do."

This participant did demonstrate an awareness of the impact of culture, but the language used indicated the perception that some students present as an empty vessel, and speaks to the study question: In what ways do general education teachers describe their teaching of and factors they consider in, the GEI process for CLD Students?

Conversely, participant M described her experiences with instructing students that spoke another language. During M's student teaching experience there were students "from all over the place" and they (teachers/staff) would often ask about prior school experience "cuz sometimes you know some kiddos come where they….this is their first school experience." M also described a time when a student was "counting in his own language" and so the participant went on YouTube and found out how to say the numbers and wrote them out phonetically for the student. Additionally, M stated that questions will be asked in Spanish for students if it is felt that they know the answer but need it said to them in their native language. For example, M acknowledged asking herself "If you can, if this question was asked in their language, would they get it?" This participant described this accommodation as giving ESOL students "credit where it's due." Neither of these participants addressed the potential disconnect of probing student knowledge they had not had the opportunity to use during instruction.

One participant, Z, mirrored statements of M in that she claimed to pair students with others that had the same home language to aid comprehension. Z was the other participant to mention "bringing in their culture," and that if possible Z would speak in Spanish because "like you know they love it." Z stated that the students would "light up when they hear their home language." This participant also described having literature in both English and Spanish in the classroom she stated felt that this helped build relationship and connections with the students. The reasons given and what is done as described by the participants demonstrates some consideration for the biography of the student. However, the described actions appear to lack understanding of the deeper factors that may play into what is seen as student performance in this setting. For instance, how is the student's prior knowledge and lived experiences being used in connection with the academic material? Is there consideration for how the linguistic, cultural, and experiential differences may impact performance on static assessments?

Three participants described understanding or knowing when a concern was not related to a "language barrier." The following are statements made by participants related to their knowledge/experience with determining language concerns for CLD students:

> Participant M: "Um, for English Language Learner wise, right? You know, I feel like I'm always scared when I bring one up (as needing IPSP) because I feel like the very first question they're gonna say is, 'is it a language barrier?' and I feel like I, as a teacher, you know you've kind of thought of that already and you wouldn't have brought them up in the first place if it wasn't (just a language barrier)."
>
> Participant Z: "I knew it wasn't an ELL issue you know um cuz English was the main thing that was spoken you know with mom…like she would she only spoke English with

him. And like we took the time to to ask is what language are spoken in the home…who's talking to him."

"Trying to say that in a nice positive way but like I don't think it's because he's considered having a second language cuz ummm like I'd said mom and dad both speak, and dad's not always really in the picture and…but he does have an older brother who mainly just only speaks English."

"I mean he is an ESOL student, he's now in the sixth grade, but um yeah, but like English is the main thing spoken at home, it's not like he's going home and listening to Spanish and having to try to process all of that."

Participant T: "Like if I, if I know that it's a language issue, if you're lower language that's going to affect how you're learning."

"But if I don't think it's just language, if I feel there's kind of another thing that's blocking them from being able to grasp what we're learning, then I'll put it in (in IPSP) as language or and reading, or language and math, so it just depends on that kid, that's why I said you have to really build that relationship."

These participant statements reveal a self-concept that they can, as individuals, determine when the concern is due to a "language barrier." The justification given for whether there are factors from linguistic diversity or not reveals misunderstanding of language systems, and the overarching desire to *rule out* language as a factor in learning. Additionally descriptors such as "lower language, " "language barrier," "language issue" and being "scared" to bring up a student demonstrate negative connotations given to the complex language skills and abilities of CLD students. The idea that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have "lower language" devalues them and their history. It also reveals lack of knowledge related to

language acquisition, despite attainment of an endorsement to teach ESOL students. In sum, there appears to be a perception, or belief, on the part of participants that they have the ability, absent other insights, to determine whether *language* matters.

An individual's language and culture are significant aspects of that person's biography and history. The desire to *rule out* this part of a student's life could be interpreted as not allowing the student's story to be heard, or deeming that story irrelevant. A person's story (storytelling) is, in fact, critical for effective instruction, part of a well-implemented model of RtI (NCRTI, 2010). If the student's story or biography is dismissed, the performance, or lack thereof, is seen only through the teacher's lens, and only given voice through that teacher's language. As has been seen, an individual's lens is often influenced by his/her/their meaning perspectives that originate in how one is socialized, and can be in contrast from that of a CLD student. Therefore, if storytelling is not allowed, or disregarded, the viewpoint of the majority group (teachers) and data (quantitative) is perpetuated, potentially to the detriment of the student (Goessling, 2018).

Findings and Discussion: Storytelling (Biopsychosocial Considerations)

Herrera (2010) emphasizes the need for understanding the diversity, student assets, and factors related to instruction that impact and influence a student's performance in an academic setting. Herrera is not the only one to highlight the need for such considerations. In fact, Noltemeyer & McLoughlin (2012) mention that there is much need surrounding research regarding the appropriateness of academic interventions for CLD students. This is especially cogent given that NCRTI (2010) states that a component of RtI is to provide culturally relevant instruction. Additionally, Montalvo et al. (2014) similarly state that not understanding a student's background (including customs, prior knowledge, language) has an impact on the effectiveness of instruction for CLD students. Rojas and Avitia (2017) further highlight a shortage of teachers

effectively trained to provide appropriate instruction to students that are CLD. Cabral (2008) found evidence of a *deficit* perspective, where lack of student success is often viewed as a student-held issue, instead of analyzing interaction between student and instructional methods. Finally, Cabral (2008) concluded that many interventions put into place during a GEI process did not address alteration of instructional methods, and often occurred as separate intervention *treatments* outside of the classroom setting.

From the research above, it can be stated that the knowledge of teachers, instruction, methods and personalized interventions are paramount for academic success for CLD students. The previous findings section revealed that although participants acknowledged a student's diversity, they did not describe connecting academic concepts to the biography of the student, or validating and utilizing student's stories on a deeper level for the purpose of instruction.

One of the questions posed to participants asked whether specific interventions, accommodations, and instructional modifications had been considered for CLD students in the IPSP. Similar to the findings of Cabral (2008), and Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2012), the participants in this study also described interventions outside of the classroom, and did not alter instruction.

A few participants went as far as to say that instructional strategies for ESOL students were good for all students so there was no need to "individualize." The lack of individualization is interesting as the first word in the process is *Individual.* For instance, participant M stated "so the good news about that is like usually the strategy that you learn for like ESOL learners work well for everybody who's struggling," and participant T stated "Right, I don't really individualize it, I do it for everybody and it's just good practice for them all to learn how to use the different things." Interestingly, these participants used 'good for all' statements in the context

of referring students for whom it did not work. Per this district, the goal of IPSP is to determine the levels and conditions under which the student does succeed. This would in effect be different for each student, or individual. The following are the interventions, accommodations, or modifications that were the same, given by each participant, specific to their individual CLD students:

- Visuals
- Small group instruction
- Shortened assignments
- Scribing and/or highlight writing

Other interventions cited by participants included: (a) sentence stems; (b) manipulatives; (c) tiered intervention groups; (d) one-on-one instruction; (e) word banks; (f) graphic organizers; (g) additional time; (h) proximity to teacher; (i) checking vision and hearing on a student; and (j) repetition of instruction.

Participant Z was the only interviewee that mentioned bringing in the student's culture as an intervention/accommodation. The example given of how this participant brought in culture was "you know they love it when you start talking in Spanish."

A majority of the items listed did not require the teacher (participant) to alter her method of instruction within the classroom setting, during core. The tiered intervention groups may be the only item listed that would have used varying methods of instruction, however these occur apart from core instruction. Often, these intervention groups are instructed by a different staff member. Both reading interventionists and ESOL teachers were listed by participants as staff that may be working with CLD students during this intervention time. Only participant Z made

mention of a modification that might be considered an altered method of instruction. Z stated that for some students:

> "I've provided like even just numbers for them. Like if we have a problem and we're doing addition, they have something that they can just trace and they're still writing it and tracing it that way they don't have to worry about 'I don't know to even write my numbers."

Small group instruction was the accommodation listed by each participant as being done for CLD students. When asked what occurred during this instruction, responses revealed that the instruction was often the same, but with structural accommodations, or modifications for responding. For example:

> "…and so like during writing, my para that's running that group, she's teaching, or like they're learning what I'm teaching to the rest of the class. But like she has specific sentence stems that she will give them…..while the rest of my class might not get that whole sentence stem."

This indicates that the instruction itself remains the same, but students are allowed modifications in their responding. Another participant described small group as "going through the lesson and breaking it down," while others mentioned that information was repeated.

These findings mirror those of Cabral (2008) in that much of what was said to be done during IPSP did not require the participants to alter their method of instruction. It is the instruction and interventions that are critical for the success of CLD students (Herrera & Murry, 2016; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2012); more specifically, the *appropriateness* of instruction and interventions.

While accommodations are listed as being done in the classroom setting, individualization to each particular student in the process does not appear evident based on information provided by participants. As has been stated, consideration for each student's story is central to effective instruction. If individualization, characterized by attention to presentation/instruction of material is not occurring, how can participants/teachers be provided the needed training in this area?

The participants for this study were anticipated to have additional understandings and knowledge related to CLD students due to their ESOL endorsement and experience in a school with a high CLD student population. Evidence of insight was indicated by participant mentions of diversity. However, more can be done to increase the effectiveness of instruction. Paramount among recommendations would be to allow each student to tell his/her/their story, use the student's story/lived experiences to drive instruction, and individualize interventions to each student.

Findings and Discussion: The (Mis)Understanding of IPSP

What is the Goal?

A problem-solving approach, as described by Cabral (2008), is characterized by revisions of interventions, modifications, etc. until the refinements lead to understanding of the conditions under which a student *does* learn, or is successful. The IPSP document utilized within this district, delineates this as the stated goal of this process. Cabral (2008) described the data learned from finding level/conditions of success critical for determining if such can be achieved through general education, or evaluation for special education is warranted. Despite little mention from these participants, review of a blank IPSP form for the district includes references to how a student's strengths are used to facilitate success. Additionally, the original IPSP forms from 2015

(PSP) included the following statement at the end of the form to remind teams: "Problem solving process is complete when the team can describe the conditions under which the student is successful."

The intent of a problem-solving process, which falls under RtI, is to determine, in order to provide, what is needed for student success. This process presumes and assures consideration of a CLD student's story, and the factors of instruction that may impact student performance (language demands of classroom, cultural knowledge needed to understand curriculum, and relevance of materials), (Cabral, 2008; Herrera, 2010; Montalvo et al., 2010; NCRTI, 2010; Rojas & Avitia, 2017).

Each participant was asked to describe the process and what they feel the goal is of IPSP. Not one participant indicated that it was to determine under what conditions a child was successful. This is interesting because the intent has been made clear by being present on the forms, and was emphasized when IPSP began. Many of the participants alluded, or bluntly stated, that they felt the goal, or their desire of initiating the process was to get the student evaluated for special education services. Participant O even expressed her desire for students that she has in the process to be "tested again" if they do not qualify. She stated:

"...and you're like not test her again, swear to God please test him again."

Another participant stated:

> "….for the kids who aren't making growth, the goal of the IPSP would be to get them into the SPED (special education) testing process to see if there's other things that are causing the learning disability, not learning disabilities, but like what's inhibiting their learning."

This participant did acknowledge that some students, given interventions/modifications/accommodations, do make growth during the process, but those that do not should be tested. When considering the interventions and adjustments made during IPSP, as described by participants, the lack of growth for some students comes into question. If the interventions provided are those stated, then there may be a lack of individualization, or modification to the presentation of instruction, and lack of consideration for linguistic and cultural factors for CLD students.

A third participant, M, echoed similar thoughts. M stated:

> "…that's why I'm opening the PSP, in the hopes that we'll either get a solution, maybe they just need some extra time or some little bit of extra help, or it will go to that end road where they do test."

Language used to describe the testing process as the 'end road' shows that this is where this participant feels the process leads and terminates. Participant O was a bit blunter in her description of the process. O stated:

> "…you're putting in their different focus points that you're wanting to really focus in on for the student, so that way you can potentially, hopefully, get them tested for special education."

At another point, O also stated:

> "…because once they see that we've done ABC and D, and they're still not being successful as they should, as their peers, then we can kind of shove them more into the like, 'hey, let's go ahead and test them and see how they're going to do."

Both sentiments from participant O reveal the perspective that if a student is referred for this GEI process (IPSP), the outcome should be testing for special education services. This is in direct contrast with the actual intent of the problem-solving process (IPSP).

When appropriate instruction and interventions are not provided, the question of appropriate referral and/or identification of CLD students comes into question. Additionally, when participants see the goal as testing based on their personal knowledge, static assessments, and lack of growth from the types of interventions described, concern for accurate referrals and identification arises, which has the potential to contribute to disproportionality.

What is needed?

Towards the end of each interview, participants (general education classroom teachers) were asked to provide their thoughts on the GEI process in general, and for any recommendations for improvement. The responses revealed interesting insights into the teachers' perceptions of the process and what would help improve their understanding.

Three of the five participants requested more training on how to complete the form itself (e.g. what data needs to be included and where). For example, Z stated:

> "It'd be nice to have like a list of those (interventions), but I know like my teams talked about it would be nice to see like a great example of a PSP so we know 'hey we're on the right track or I need more of this kind of information on my PSP,"

M stated "I think the district would benefit from having all teachers go through training on how to do an IPSP and what are you supposed to be putting in there," again demonstrating a primary desire for procedural knowledge. This demonstrates a lack of knowledge or awareness of the actual intent of the problem-solving process. There is greater focus on filling out the form

correctly, than understanding the individual student of concern and how to accommodate instruction to achieve student *and teacher* success.

The other two participants, also indicated desires to learn about additional types of data. Specifically, they expressed interest in training and education on interventions or strategies to use with students outside of what is already done in the standard treatment protocol. In essence, interventions designed for the individual child. Participant K demonstrated this in her statement:

> "…but it's training to help us target like how to…what to put in place, how to get those kids where they need to be while still teaching to the standards that we have to grade and all that stuff. So just, I don't know anything that could help us target those kids who are below grade level."

This shows a desire and awareness that there are other strategies and interventions that the participant is unaware of, and an inclination to find out what is successful for each student. Participant O also indicated a desire for more knowledge regarding interventions, and how one might identify and collect such data.

Overall, participant responses revealed misunderstanding the intent of the problem-solving process, but also a desire for more knowledge on how to help students that are struggling. This indicates a need for further education on the purpose, or 'why', of this process, along with insight to the failure of previous trainings to convey this intent. Was it some aspect of the training structure or content, or how messages became changed through reinterpretation within teams and departments? These crucial questions should be addressed as critical for improving instruction and interventions, and subsequently better outcomes for CLD students.

Frustrations

The last section discusses the *frustration* that emerged from analysis of participant responses around the process in general and more specifically, for CLD students. The frustrations felt were nearly the same with each participant. This is interesting as the participants represented varying grade levels and academic teams. What appeared to frustrate participants most was the length of the process, how long it took to 'get through' the process, rather than the potential for insights to leverage student success. This is perhaps not surprising, in light of the co-occurring theme: equating referral for the problem-solving process with the action necessary to get students *tested*, and presumably placed in special education.

Frustration with the length of time IPSP took was a general frustration, but also one specific for CLD students. All five participants discussed frustration with how long the process took, and concern for the children to continue on in the process with "nothing ever done." This again reflects the perception that referral and problem-solving processes as non-productive passages of time. Another frustration noted was the fear of bringing up a student that is CLD because of the questions that will be asked. For example, one participant specifically discussed being asked "Is it a language barrier?" to which the response was, "as a teacher, you know, you've kind of thought of that through already." Many participants felt that the process was "even longer for ELL students." In fact, participant O stated "I wish it went faster."

Another frustration mentioned by most participants was the lack of new ideas offered or generated during this process. Participant K felt that when a student is newly in the process, more ideas are produced during IPSP meetings. K stated that:

> "…when the kid keeps getting brought up and we are like what we're doing is not working, like this is the fourth month we've talked about this kid…I don't know what to do. I think it kind of is just like turned into a waiting game."

M described being frustrated at not seeing the results of all the interventions being put into place and “you don’t get to have a solid conversation around like okay, what what are the next steps? what can we do?” Yet another participant, T, described feeling *defeated* because nothing that was being tried had worked and the participant was at a loss. Such frustrations combined with the recommendations of the participants demonstrate a desire and need for additional information and education related to effective instruction and interventions for CLD students. Education that goes beyond what has been obtained through the participant’s ESOL endorsements.

Within the context of these data, having the student evaluated for special education seems to be the paramount desire or objective of a problem-solving process, and for that process to be ‘faster.’ Voiced frustrations such as these, suggest that, contrary to the intent of problem-solving, participants may prefer quick validation of opinions that the student is inherently unable to learn. Such mindsets can preclude insight to, and development of, the intervention, accommodations, and modifications, students may benefit from in any setting, including, if applicable, special education (Herrera et al., 2020).

In summary, several themes emerged through the analysis of these findings. Within each there were several subthemes that were relevant to the scope of this study. Emergent themes included: (a) the family and parent; (b) qualitative data versus quantitative data; (c) descriptions of the student and storytelling; (d) teacher self-perceptions; and (e) misunderstanding of the GEI process. Through the analysis of both the IPSP meeting observed and the interviews conducted there was alignment with the findings from the pilot study.

Themes revealed by both studies aligned with the theoretical framework upon which this study developed. Reference to CLD students’ stories (storytelling), and biopsychosocial histories were surface level, and often not considered or discussed by participants in this study. With the

CLD student's stories disregarded or overlooked, there was a large reliance on quantitative data during decision-making. This is the data privileged in this district and site. It is the information deemed important for understanding a student's capability. When students are identified without context (their story) the 'deficit' model, wherein blame for lack of success lies within the student, persists (Annamma, 2015). Deficit thinking reinforces practices designed toward (the remediation of) students, instead of reflecting on the instruction, educators, and the system (Haas & Brown, 2019).

An individual's perspectives influence actions and behaviors (Mezirow, 1997). While it is outside the scope of this study to examine each participant's story to fully examine their sociolinguistic meaning perspectives, it is interesting to consider the assumptions made by participants in reference to parents and families. Those parents/families that did not *act* or *communicate* in a certain way were suggested to not fully understand what was said to them, or to not value education at all. Both are value judgments placed on parents and families by the participants. An individual's meaning perspectives are influenced by family, culture, education, and experiences. Such judgments may also be influenced by the participant's experience and the "E"ducation discourse group, but it is important to realize the impacts of such meaning perspectives on teaching and learning.

Finally, it became clear that the goal of this district's GEI process (IPSP), according to participants, was to end up testing the students in this process for special education. The participants did express hope that the actions taken by teachers and staff during this process would result in student growth, however, the "end road" always lead back to evaluation. The frustration with *how long* the process took was another indication that the participants desired student success, but if not readily achieved they wanted the child pushed through the process.

The perceived goal of IPSP differs from the intended outcome of a problem-solving process (Cabral, 2008). The mismatch between original intent and perceived goal demonstrates a need for understanding the 'why' behind the process.

Participants in this study had increased knowledge of factors related to CLD students based on experience and additional education. Expressions of caring and desire for student success were also observed. Many participants described a myriad of emotions when describing students not making progress, or when they had no more *tools left in their toolbox*. Stated desires to further knowledge bases and skill sets is a positive indicator that dispositions and mindsets can likewise grow. Recommendations based upon study findings will be further discussion in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore general education teachers' perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse students during a general education intervention process. Specifically, this study explored how classroom teachers used language to discuss and describe CLD students in the GEI process. The impetus for this study were phenomena observed and experienced in a large, Midwestern district. Most notably, increased numbers of English Language Learners (encompassed by the term CLD) were placed in special education during a period when English Language Learner enrollment decreased over the previous three academic years. This data sparked concern related to national issues regarding disproportionality of identification and placement for CLD students, and factors impacting disproportionality. Qualitative data accumulated during this study were used to identify participant perspectives related to crucial pieces of a prereferral (GEI) process. This chapter will provide: (a) a general summary of the study; (b) a review of the key findings; (c) implications of the study (theoretical and practical); and (d) recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

The Individuals with Disability Act (IDEIA, 1997) paved the way for the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) models. The implementation of such models was anticipated to improve methods to identify a learning disability, and reduce inappropriate referrals for special education. Culturally relevant and respectful instruction has been a specified feature of instruction necessary to achieve these ends (NCRTI, 2010). Two purported outcomes have the potential to impact disproportionate representation of CLD students within special education, especially within the context of researcher concerns related to assessment bias, ineffective

instruction, mismatch between instructor culture with student's, and lack of understanding factors impacting instruction and performance for CLD students (Abedi, 2008; Abedi & Faltis, 2015; Chamberlain, 2005; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Enrique et al., 2013; Haas & Brown, 2019; Harry & Klingner, 2007). Concurrent with the above concerns, research has explored the impact of individual's meaning perspectives and biases as they relate to individual actions.

Meaning perspectives can be described as an individual's beliefs that influence their actions (Mezirow, 1991). These beliefs begin to be formed from birth, and are refined, and ingrained based on individual's family, culture, community, education, experiences, etc. (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (1991) states that often these perspectives are subconscious without an individual being able to readily identify or reflect upon them. An individual's meaning perspectives can influence one's actions (Mezirow, 1991). Similarly research on implicit bias reports a lack of overt awareness by individuals, and are more likely to influence the actions of individuals (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014; Glock & Kovacs, 2013). Interestingly, the research related to explicit and implicit bias has also indicated a difference in teacher perceptions of students from backgrounds that differ from being of White and/or European descent (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Meaning perspectives and implicit bias, formed during formative years, may impact individual's actions. Therefore, the meaning perspectives that emerge through analysis of language used by teachers, have relevance in consideration of disproportionality and teacher perspectives.

Additionally, the concepts of storytelling and colorblindness are critical for understanding and validating the biopsychosocial aspects of any student, especially those that are culturally and linguistically diverse. Storytelling allows an individual to contextualize and add depth to a perceived narrative based on their lived experiences (Moyer et al., 2020). Disregarding

a student's personal story creates a 'deficit' model of thinking (Annamma, 2015). It is the student's story and lived experiences that should be taking center stage within the curriculum (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). This is especially prudent when considering appropriate instruction for CLD students, and even more so when during exploration of perceived need.

Colorblindness is a concept that allows only the most obvious forms of racism to be brought to light (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). For those that claim being 'colorblind' it allows them to declare that they are not racist. Race, itself, is a social construct according to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), and racism is, in fact, a common occurrence within society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However, by disregarding or ignoring race, people of color and their stories are pushed aside and silenced (Bernal, 2002; Taylor et al., 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). This, then, directly impacts a student's ability to add depth to what tends to be a 'quantitative' only narrative, while also furthering majoritarian stories which often provide negative stereotypes for those individuals and communities that differ from the dominant group (Goessling, 2018).

The above theoretical framework was used to design a study examining the language of teachers during a GEI process for CLD students. The need to explore the perspective of classroom teachers was evident by the lack of research into how language used during a GEI process may impact issues of disproportionality (Waitoller et al., 2010). This study, therefore, aimed to address the following research question:

1. In what ways do general education teachers describe their teaching of and factors they consider in the GEI process for CLD students?

The data gathered to explore the research question was obtained through (a) records review during the pilot study, (b) observation of an IPSP meeting, and (c) semi-structured

interviews with general education classroom teachers. The information was transcribed and analyzed using Nvivo software and Gee's (2014) building task tools. Specifically, the Connections, Sign Systems and Knowledge, and Politics tools. From the analysis, the transcribed information was coded into categories, which allowed for emergence of prominent themes (Bhattacharya, 2017). Five general themes, each with subthemes, emerged from the data.

Triangulation of data helped increase both validity and reliability within qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This was achieved within this study by the use of multiple forms of data, including record reviews, observations, and interviews. A pilot study was conducted which provided additional data and analysis from which this study was created. Researcher checks to increase the trustworthiness of this study included a researcher subjectivity statement, outside individual review of procedures, peer debriefing, and detailed demographic information for the potential sites.

The theoretical framework described and data collection methodologies employed have resulted in findings with potential significance to the field of CLD student education. The main findings from this study will be described and discussed in the following section.

Review of Principle Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the language and data used by general education teachers during the GEI process for CLD students. There is a need to explore the stories behind the numbers, and general education precepts that impact disproportionality as well. The principle findings in this study fall into broad themes, with specific sub-themes under each. The themes from this study mirror findings from the pilot study, and are similar to research findings conducted by Cabral in 2008. The results from analysis of all data sources indicate a

general lack of awareness, knowledge, and consideration of the impact of a student's biopsychosocial history within the academic setting.

As indicated in Chapter Four, the analysis of interview transcripts revealed several factors from which the principle findings were derived. Namely, an overreliance on quantitative data, lack of individualization of interventions, a mindset geared towards testing students for special education, and assumptions regarding parents and families. In an apparent disconnect, participants voiced both confidence in their abilities to "know" students' language capacities, while simultaneously expressing a desire to learn how to develop interventions for CLD students. Interestingly, a majority of the participants had obtained additional coursework in the area of instruction for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Despite this additional knowledge, a depth of understanding the importance of a student's story, or history, and its impact for instruction and interventions was missing. This should prompt questions as to what difference, if any, is seen for those students without an endorsed teacher.

The findings from this qualitative study can be summarized through the themes that emerged via observations and interviews. The overall themes related to *role of parents/families*, *teacher self-perceptions*, *storytelling*, and *the misunderstanding of IPSP*.

The *role of parents/families* reflects the assumptions held about parents, and how they should 'act' according to the participants. This demonstrates the lens (or bias) held by participants on what they deem acceptable, or indicative of parent support. *Teacher self-perceptions* reflects the perceived importance of their knowledge without consideration of family/parent knowledge of student. *Storytelling* reflects the extent to which a student's story is utilized within the classroom, during interpretation, and consideration for interventions during the GEI process. *(Mis)understanding of IPSP* reflects the inherent mindset related to struggling

students within the IPSP process, the desire to hurry up and test CLD students, as well as frustrations and recommendations for the process. The frustrations and recommendations were found to be extremely similar for each participant, which lends credence to a similar understanding, or misunderstanding, of the process, and overall ideas for improvement.

Conclusions from the Study

This study examined the data and language used by general education teachers for CLD students in a general education intervention process. The primary sources of data included a review of IPSP documents for the study site, observation of an IPSP meeting, and semi-structured interviews of five general education teachers at the study site. All sources of data revealed similar patterns of participant perspectives on the GEI process for students, for CLD students in particular, their families, and the interventions cited for unmet needs.

The building task tools used from Gee (2014) provided the lens which informed analysis of the language used by participants. This analysis revealed *social goods* that were deemed important within "E"ducation, and whose knowledge and opinion was valued. There was evident connection between the social goods valued and which sources of knowledge held privilege. From the use of the tools, the emergent themes can be tied to the findings from the pilot study, and previous research, as well as the theoretical framework that informed research question for this study.

The framework used for this study was derived from concepts of Mezirow's meaning perspectives, bias, storytelling, and colorblindness. The themes that emerged link to these concepts. Participant perspectives demonstrate underlying beliefs related to parents and families, and the social goods students do or do not possess related to education.

The concepts of storytelling and colorblindness are evident through the themes related to consideration of student's history, alteration of instruction/interventions, and dismissiveness of individualization for CLD students. The need for such considerations, and impacts thereof of lack of, are outlined and sourced in previous chapters.

Observed phenomena formed the impetus for a study to illuminate data showing increased identification of ELL students for special education within a context of decreased ELL enrollment. The outcome of this study has the potential to both shed light on the factors leading to such phenomena, but also provide an opportunity to further education, training, and instructor knowledge. The opportunities presented by this research study findings have the ability to impact CLD students within our educational system, the disproportional representation therein, and the systems of instructional response.

Implications of the Study

The language and data used by general education intervention teachers related to CLD students in a GEI process, in a large, Midwestern district was explored via reviewing IPSP documents, observations, and conducting semi-structured interviews. Findings from this qualitative study were triangulated to increase the trustworthiness of the data. Subsequently, the findings presented a number of implications for schools, teachers, and CLD students.

The implications for this study will be presented at both the theoretical and the practical levels. Theoretical level implications connect the findings to the wealth of research discussed in Chapter Two, and throughout the chapters. At the practical level, the findings discussed will have significant implications for pre-service programs, districts, special education departments, ESOL coordinators, and classroom teachers.

Theoretical Significance

Disproportional representation of CLD students in special education remains a major issue within the education system (Haas & Brown, 2019; Hoover et al., 2018; Klingner et al., 2006). While the issue of disproportionality has been present for decades, policies and practices have implemented to address the phenomena and its harmful effects (Bradley et al., 2007). RtI came to be as a result of IDEA, with one purported outcome being a decrease inappropriate referrals, and potentially reducing disproportionality (Enrique et al., 2013; NCRTI, 2010). However, one of the components to a well implemented RtI program is instruction that is culturally relevant for CLD students (NCRTI, 2010). Culturally relevant instruction is indeed important for CLD students.

Research spanning several decades demonstrates a need to consider the relevance of the curriculum for CLD students. Several researchers describe the importance of being aware of a student's story, and the implications of this on performance (Herrera, 2010; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2012; Rojas & Avitia, 2017). In fact, Haas and Brown (2019), Kovaleski et al. (2013) specifically cite inappropriate instruction for CLD students as a potential factor leading to disproportionality. Additionally, a mismatch of student and teacher cultures, or inaccurate assumptions of behavior due to lack of knowledge of a CLD student and his/her/their culture and community also factor in a misinterpretation of data (Herrera et al., 2020; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2012; Rojas & Avitia, 2017).

The importance of storytelling also relates to issues of disregarding, or ignoring, a student's own story, or biopsychosocial history. Storytelling can be described as the sharing, or describing, of "ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life-lessons through stories or narratives," (Serrat, 2008). The idea of storytelling has been used in legal areas, to change policies, and help share individual's experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Moyer et al.,

2020). In fact, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) says that a student's story should be at the forefront of curriculum considerations. Storytelling can provide context and depth to *data*, which has particular significance when gathered from a *deficit* model perspective (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002 as cited in Roy & Roxas 2011). Individual stories provide context and sometimes counterweights to views held of CLD students by those of the majority community (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Goessling, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Thus, a student's story is crucial in combating disproportionality, inappropriate instruction, and contextualization of the data presented (Goessling, 2018; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Storytelling is crucial to reconsideration of what constitutes data, and possibly even the reopening of minds.

Findings from this study suggest only superficial awareness on the part of participants regarding the importance of a students' stories. Participants described *bringing in* student culture by speaking in Spanish, having literature representative of students, translating instruction/questions to a child's native language, and determining whether a language other than English is spoken by the child/family. However, there was no mention of how the biopsychosocial history of a child was validated or incorporated into academic lessons nor how a student's story may be an influential factor in why he/she is not performing to the *standard*, or teacher's desired outcome.

In fact, what emerged were assumptions made about parent's values and comprehension. There was little indication parents/families were sought out to gain their opinion, or better understand their child, culture, community. Additionally, the lack of individualization of interventions provided for CLD students, absent examples given of modifying the instruction given belies a presumption that there is a prescribed way of teaching which *fits* all. The lack of individualization, set way of instructing, and lack of consideration or input of parental

perspective does not allow for contextualization of the data. Data without dimension leads to overreliance on numerical data (scores) from assessments, often found to be biased (Abedi, 2008; Abedi & Faltis, 2015; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000).

The disregard, or devaluing, of both student and family perspective can be likened to the concept of colorblindness, or presumptions that equality already exists (DiAngelo, 2018). In fact, as was mentioned by one participant "…I don't really individualize it (interventions), I do it for everybody who's struggling," appears to provide *equal* support for all. However, this statement demonstrates the lack of consideration for each student as a person. In essence, the presence of *person blindness*. As previously stated, this *person blindness* is seen within the various themes found in this study. Including, the overreliance on quantitative data, the mis(understanding) of IPSP, storytelling, and the role of parents and families.

Another concept of theoretical significance is that of meaning perspectives. Evidence of specific meaning perspectives held by participants is displayed in all sources of data. This includes the pilot study findings, as well as the data from the observations and the interviews. One finding evident throughout is, again, the importance, of quantitative data.

The data described on the IPSP forms (pilot study) was heavily focused on static assessments such as Fastbridge, QPS, number of letters and sounds known, fluency rate, and progress monitoring from scripted intervention programs. Again, during the observation of the IPSP meeting, the same data was cited repeatedly to support concern for the student, or demonstrate that the student was unsuccessful in class. Finally, the data that was used to determine whether a student was referred for IPSP was a reiteration of what was found on the documents and stated in the meeting. Notably, there was little difference between data presented

for all students, and that specifically for CLD students. This provides another example of person blindness.

One theme closely linked to meaning perspectives is that of the role of *parents and families*. The participants provided clear examples of when parents were seen as being supportive, and when they were perceived as not valuing education. There was an expectation of certain behaviors (coming to the school, returning phone calls, supporting the need for testing, etc.) that parents/families should adhere to if truly valuing education. Acting, or behaving, a certain way is linked to the participant's meaning perspectives on what it means to be supportive, or to value education. Reduced adherence to these behavior indicated that parents were either not credible or unsupportive of processes to *help* their child. Such statements further devalue context as needed to interpret *data*.

Overall, the findings from this study can be connected to the theoretical framework used. The ideas of storytelling and colorblindness are evident by the prescribed interventions and instruction described, and by the decontextualization of students through overreliance on data and disregard for student and family stories. Meaning perspectives are beliefs based upon experience, culture, education, and community (Mezirow, 1991). The belief of what knowledge (data) is privileged, and the ascribed values of parents is evident throughout the pilot study and the findings from this study. Findings from this study support the theory that an individual's actions can be influenced by their meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991; 1997). This study also found that privileged data (quantitative) was the driving force for both referring and determining whether a student was making progress. This bears significance given the inappropriate referrals is a major factor in the issue of disproportionality of CLD students (Collier, 2015; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000).

Practical Significance/Implications

While the previous section described the theoretical significance of the study, this section will review its practical significance. Practical significance compels consideration of findings that will be beneficial for pre-service programs, district personnel, special education personnel, instructional coaches, ESOL teachers, as well as classroom teachers. Each practical significance noted within this section was derived from the analysis of the data sources. The trustworthiness of this study was enhanced through the use of several steps undertaken by the researcher. Included among these were the use of rick, thick descriptions, audit trail, and peer debriefing.

The description of demographics given for the site and district indicate a growing population of CLD students within our education system. Therefore, the major findings of this study have significant practical implications for the above mentioned groups. The practices highlighted will include (a) overreliance on quantitative data; (b) lack of individualization and instructional modification; and (c) a general lack of understanding of the GEI process.

The participants described quantitative data from a set of assessments as what is used to determine academic success. One of the practices contributing to the identification of CLD students within special education is the use of standardized assessments that are often biased and negatively impact CLD students (Abedi, 2008; Abedi & Faltis, 2015; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Hoover et al., 2018). From the current study and pilot study findings, it is clear that such data is seen as the *end all be all* when considering referral to a GEI process, and even justification for lack of progress leading to an evaluation. Triangulation of data revealed this to be a prevalent theme.

Practical implications for ESOL teachers, classroom teachers, instructional coaches, special education, and district personnel pertain to instructional modifications and interventions

for CLD students. The *one size fits all* thinking observed during review of IPSP forms, and participant interviews is inconsistent with the policies and spirit of IDEA. Therefore, it is not only an area we might address, assuredly one we must. Having *standard* interventions/modifications does not allow for individualization for the specific needs of a particular student. Lack of individualization does not create opportunities to determine the success level for the student, the original goal of the IPSP process.

Contextualization of factors related to student's histories is crucial to explain student performance and to individualize interventions. Targeted professional development would be beneficial for all those directly involved in the interpretation of data for the purpose of the instructional refinement. Biography Driven Instruction (Herrera, 2016), needed to assure student success, would begin to lay the groundwork for insights and practices which can lead to more appropriate instruction for CLD students.

Educators' abilities to understand the true purpose, or *why*, of a general education intervention process is crucial to durable impact on disproportionality. This includes district personnel, administrators, and each staff member at individual buildings within a district. The findings demonstrate a clash between the original intent of IPSP, and the goal of the process as described by participants. All participants reported believing that the goal of the process is to test for special education if student does not respond to generic interventions (e.g. visuals). Many stated that if they (participant) put a student in the process it was basically because they knew/felt the student needed to be tested for special education. Additionally, the time factor was mentioned by each participant. Each wanted the process to be quicker, especially for CLD students.

Understanding the *why* of any process may be difficult for people. The *why* may be in direct conflict with one's meaning perspectives. From Chapter Two, it is understood that meaning perspectives include *any* individual biases. While meaning perspectives and implicit biases are often formed on a subconscious level (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014; Glock & Kovacs, 2013; Mezirow, 1991), it would be beneficial to engage in conversations and trainings geared towards reflection upon one's perspectives. Additional professional development around how to find student success, and walk-through intervention development to model application of the process.

Another reason to increase knowledge around appropriate intervention is to uphold the process of IDEA. Response to Intervention was a byproduct of the IDEA reauthorization act of 1997 (Kovaleski et al., 2013). RtI identifies several features for a well implemented model. Included among these are family involvement, meeting individual needs, and ongoing assessment for instructional changes (RTI, n.d.). Therefore, a robust referral process is an essential component of IDEA. The findings of this study reveal that lack of knowledge, misinterpretation, and presumption of disability have all undermined the implementation and fidelity of this process.

The following is a summary of recommendations as they relate to the practical implications discussed:

- Investigate how to incorporate a student's story/biography into classroom instruction. Despite evidence of participants' awareness, greater depth is needed to impact the instruction of CLD students. Biography Driven Instruction is one such model that fosters insight to the importance of related understandings and practice.

- Professional development on gathering biopsychosocial data to help contextualize the data narrative.
- Professional development on the limitations of data based on standardized assessments.
- Provide education on the potential impacts of cultural and linguistic diversity performance of a student, and the benefits of accommodation for CLD students in all instructional settings.
- Education and training on how to individualize interventions and instruction for individual students.
- Engage in conversations and trainings that help individuals reflect upon their own mindset(s) and implications thereof.
- Start at the pre-service program level with education related to data, biopsychosocial importance, intervention and instruction appropriate for CLD students, and the need for critical reflection.

Recommendations for Further Studies

RtI was a result of IDEA reauthorization act of 1997 (Kovaleski et al., 2013). The creation of RtI was in part due to inadequate evaluation processes used to identify children with a learning disability (Kovaleski et al., 2013). Inappropriate referrals and evaluation processes for CLD students can lead to a disproportionate representation of CLD students within the special education system (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Whittaker & Ortiz, 2019). Factors contributing to disproportionality include inadequate instruction, use of assessments known to be biased, inappropriate referrals, as well as individually held bias.

Meaning perspectives, storytelling, and colorblindness provided a framework used to surface the language and data used by general education teachers for CLD students in a GEI process. Findings from this study had several emergent themes: (a) the family and parent; (b) qualitative data versus quantitative data; (c) descriptions of the student and storytelling; (d) teacher self-perceptions; and (e) the misunderstanding of the GEI process. The findings and discussions present in Chapters Four and Five highlight potential additional areas of research that arose from this study.

While this study revealed assumptions of parents held by participants, a study that investigates the parent perspective on teacher and school during this process would be beneficial, not only to further connections and collaborations, but parent perspective is necessary to contextualize data under consideration in the process. Roy and Roxas (2011) have done research on storytelling and the contrast between school staff and parents/families that are refugees. Understanding the perspective of parents during the GEI process would further this study.

Another significant finding was that of quantitative data as the sole *currency* during IPSP. Research has provided evidence on how data from certain sources is inherently biased against students that are culturally and linguistically diverse (Abedi, 2008; Abedi & Faltis, 2015; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). There is therefore need to examine ways in which non-quantitative data from varied sources, including outside of the academic setting, can be used to help determine what is needed for student success.

Finally, four of the five participants mentioned coming from families of educators. Each of these four participants had at least one parent that worked in education. Based on the idea that meaning perspectives are formed through community, family, experiences, etc., it may prove enlightening to contrast the meaning perspectives of teachers who have parents as educators with

those that do not. Purposeful inclusion of teachers who chose a *non-traditional* path, and those who are the only member of their family working in education could lead to new appreciation for this groups' value as educators in schools today.

Final Thoughts

The overidentification of CLD students within the special education system continues to be an issue impacting students and communities in the United States (Haas & Brown, 2019; Hoover et al., 2018; Klingner et al., 2006). Policies and practices that have been put into place to combat overreferral and overidentification do not appear to be impacting the system. Many factors contribute to the issue. Analyzation of language and data used to describe CLD students in a pre-referral process indicated a general lack of awareness of, or attention to, factors that can impact or contribute to the success of CLD students.

As the number of CLD students in the school system within the United States continues to rise, it is imperative to continue conversations and research surrounding the topic of overrepresentation. More specifically, there is a need for greater insight to the language used by educators to drive the dialogue of decisions. And, to hopefully consequentially change the narrative for CLD students in our education system.

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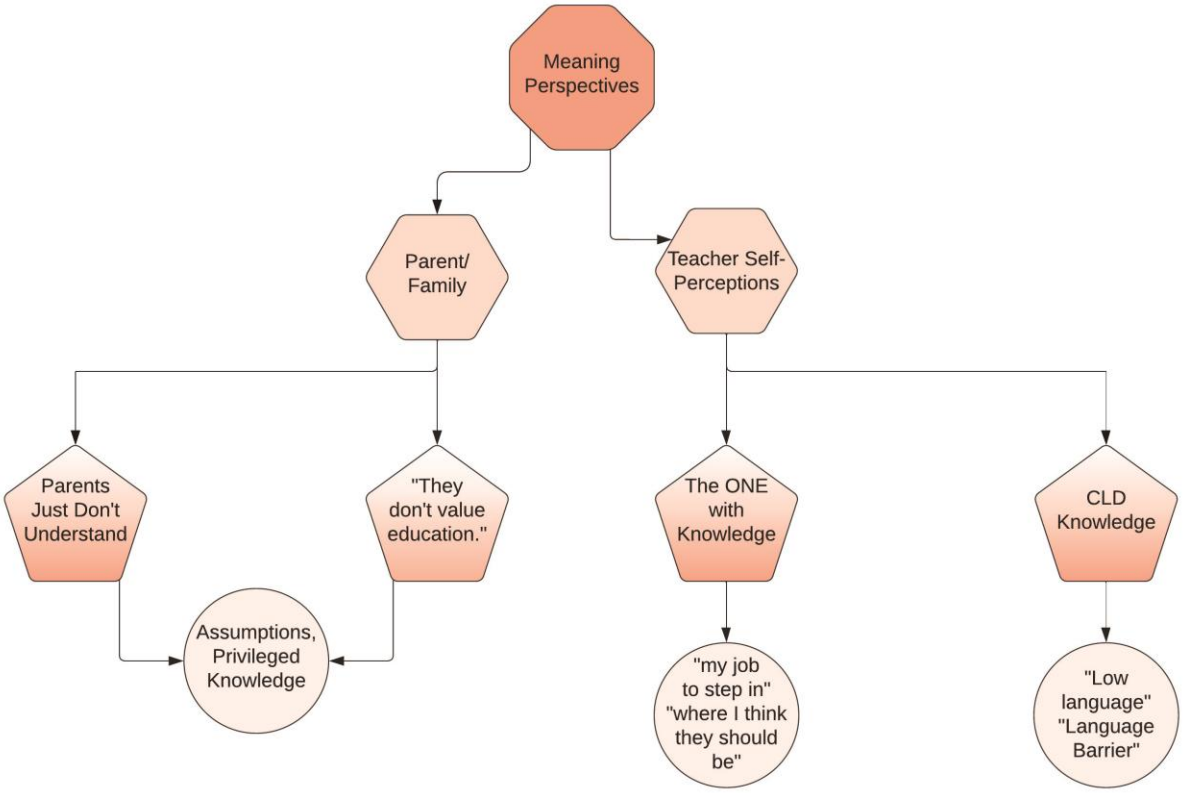
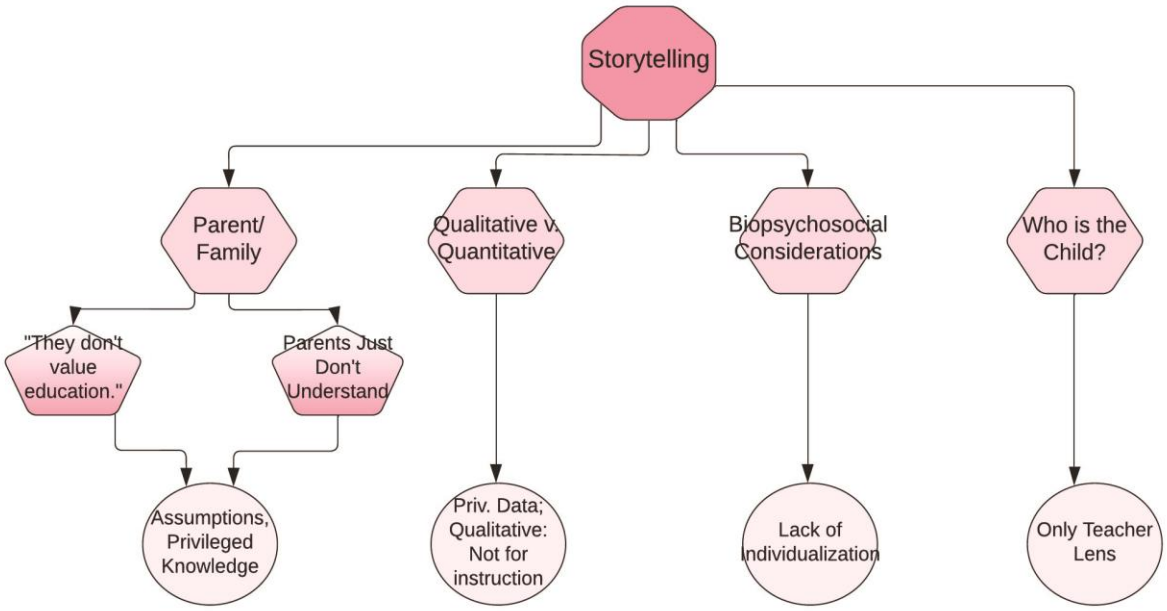
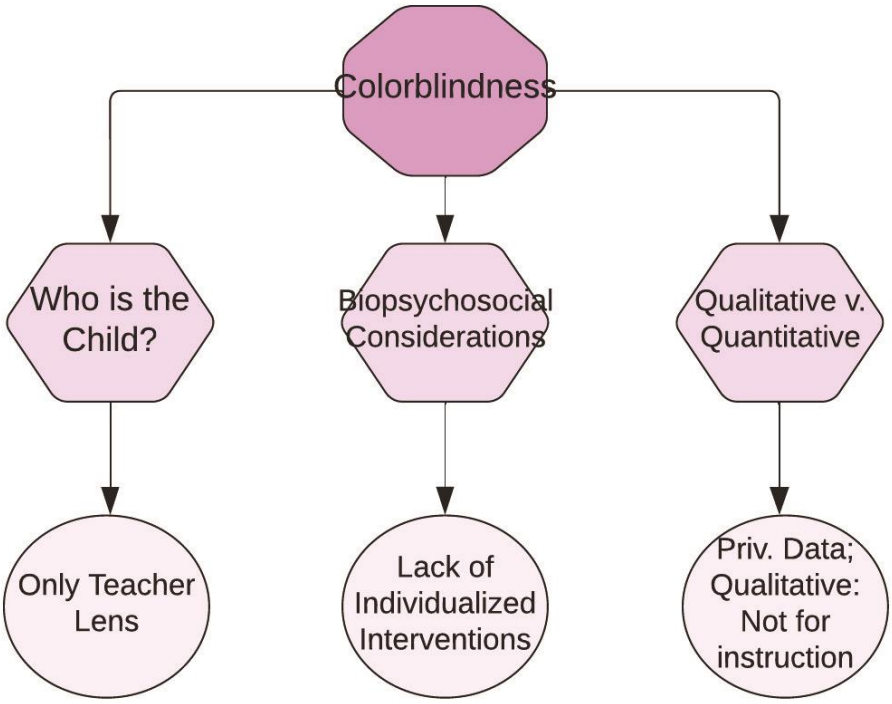
Appendix A - Meaning Perspectives



Appendix B - Storytelling



Appendix C - Colorblindness



Appendix D - Theoretical Framework