

Culturally Diverse Students In Special Education

Are They Over-Represented?

Culturally Diverse Students In Special Education

A Meta-Synthesis

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Date

Abstract

This meta-synthesis of the literature on over-prevalence of culturally diverse students represented in special education examines the possible reasons why there are more non-white students receiving special education services than previous years. Specific areas researched include looking at culturally relevant educational practices. Additionally, addressing the identity and self-esteem issues that may occur from being placed in special education. This meta-synthesis meshes the author's experiences as a special education teacher, parent, and an Alaskan Native woman. The author's intent is to also explore preventative practices to insure that culturally diverse students are not placed in special education unnecessarily.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

John L. Hosp and Daniel J. Reschly (2004) had this to say about the over-representation of culturally diverse students in special education: “*The disproportionate representation of minority students in special education has been a constant and consistent concern for nearly 4 decades*”(p. 186). This statement reiterates how students from non-traditional backgrounds are being over represented in special education. This trend has continued on today and the effects of being placed in special education can be detrimental to some culturally diverse students.

According to The National Research Council (2001), on average, more African American and Latino students are likely to qualify to receive special education services than Caucasian Students. Are the placements justified, or is our education system set up to inadvertently place students into special education without just cause?

Lisa Delpit (1995) wrote: “Currently, minority students represent a majority in all but two of our twenty-five largest cities, and by some estimates, the turn of the century will find up to 40 percent non-white children in American classrooms” (p.66). Our current education system isn’t equipped to handle the large number of diverse students who are placed in special education. Sharon Vaughn and Janette Klingner (1989) had this to say about teacher education: “The important lesson is that no one educational model will meet the

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needs of all students with learning disabilities: thus there is an advantage to providing a range of educational models” (p.86).

More teacher training and effective intervention methods have to be put in place in order to stem this over-representation dilemma. According to Eugene C. Valles (1998), incoming potential educators are not utilizing proven teaching methods, such as bilingual education protocols to enhance learning for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Numerous research studies suggest that learners from diverse cultures will retain and learn more when taught in a way that is relevant to their culture. If they can't find relevance, then they will have no desire to retain it. Teaching with student individuality and learning styles in mind, may very well help them to want to be advocates for their own learning and understanding.

Another reason there is an over-representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students is because of low academic achievement and summative testing practices. Many of these young children are struggling with reading, writing, and math. They don't have the skills necessary to do well on standardized testing. This goes back to the educational system as a whole. It is set up as a “one size fits all” methodology that doesn't coincide with people of color. According to K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty (2004): “Part of the answer lies in the corporate, standardized nature of schools. Myths of one-dimensional learners were created to serve schools-as-institutions”(P.22). Homogeneous standardized tests are a determining factor in assessing students' academic growth. These

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tests often are a determining factor when it comes to getting referrals to receive special education services.

Testing protocols that contribute to placement in special education are often biased. These tests need to be updated to reflect individual ethnic groups and cultural change. Our current testing policy has virtually been unchanged over the past 4 decades and therefore this has contributed to the problem. According to Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, and Smith (2004) in the year 2050, European American population will make up 53% of the population (Currently they are at 73%). The rest will be of ethnically diverse cultures. What does this mean when looking at our current testing policy? Testing for placement and aptitude must take into account diverse cultures. The current Standards Based Assessments, as well as testing for placement into special education, are not relevant for some groups of children. The government recognized that students from diverse backgrounds were being placed unnecessarily into special education.

Just as academic achievement and test taking is important to keep diverse students out of special education, preventative practices is also vital. Practices such as RtI (Response To Intervention) was adopted in 2004 to address the over diagnosis of students being placed in special education. RtI was originally put into effect to monitor student progress (tier 1, tier 2, tier 3) to determine which students needed intervention to help them thrive in a regular education setting. Although this is a good idea in theory, for many institutions, this has become a doorway to special education.

RtI needs to be used for its intended purpose and that is to prevent students from falling behind academically. For many educators this program has become another venue for

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testing students for the purpose of testing. In this meta-synthesis, this author would like to find out what prevention practices are successful.

Many of the Alaska Native students originally came from rural villages. Growing up in a small village, this author would like to benefit from teachers who have lived in these rural locations and have tips for teaching culturally diverse students.

Reading articles from these authors who have struggles, trials, and triumphs would make me a better special education teacher.

1.2. Author's beliefs and experiences

People of color are rarely portrayed as heroes in our public school system. Growing up in a small rural village, I wasn't privy to learning about any Alaska Native heroes. Heroes like Larry Mercurieff, a famous Unangan (Aleut) leader who received the Environmental Excellence Award from the Alaska Forum on the Environment for his lifetime achievements on environmental conservation. He also earned the Buffet Finalist Award for Indigenous leadership. This man worked tirelessly to preserve seal harvest rights for his people. Because of his actions, The Reagan Administration abandoned the commercial seal harvest of 1983.

William Paul was a famous leader from South East Alaska. He was the first Alaska Native to become an attorney. He was also the first Native person to be elected to Alaska's House of Representatives. In fact he was one of the people who drafted the legislation to adopt Alaska's flag in 1927.

Growing up in a predominantly Athabascan village, I rarely heard any positive things about my peoples' accomplishments. Strong Athabascan leaders who went to Washington DC in the 1960's, with the sole purpose of making sure my people would retain

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the land we lived on. I never heard of people like Emil Notti and Mitch Demientieff, in my history books.

I learned about Christopher Columbus, Abraham Lincoln, and John F. Kennedy. Why wasn't I also taught about Anna Tobeluk? She was a young Eskimo girl, who in 1972 sued the U.S. government because she wanted to be able to stay in her village of Nunapitchuk to finish high school.

Prior to getting my Elementary Education degree, I spent 16 years as a parent volunteer at a local elementary school in Fairbanks. During that time I worked with many teachers and students. Although a large number of Alaska Native, Hispanic, and African American students were in special education, there wasn't very much culturally relevant teaching practices going on. As far back as I can remember there has always been a large number of culturally diverse students in special education and it seemed that the protocols for testing hasn't changed very much. An important question I have asked myself is why do I care about the number of Alaska native students in special education and how is this relevant to myself as a member of that race. This author sees those young kids as my future leaders. They are the ones that will be setting policy in our Alaska Native government. They are going to be the young men and women who will be relied on to virtually take care of me when I get old.

The social implication for culturally diverse students in special education is low self-esteem. The stigmatism may have detrimental effects that are not really addressed in our school system. For many of these young diverse students pidgin holed for special education, they will have to overcome a lot of biases and labeling. Among the many articles I've read

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recently, a case study written by Macmaster, Donovan, and MacIntyre (2002) caught my eye. They wrote about student self-esteem after being diagnosed with a learning deficit. Students were affected both negatively and positively. This really made me rethink my original notion that the stigma of special education placement is always bad.

I'm currently a resource teacher in a middle school in Fairbanks and I had an unusually large caseload this year (36 students). What I found interesting is that 36% of those students are Alaska Native, 1% is African American, and the other 63% are European American. In an article written by Jacob Hibel and Susan Faircloth (2008), the national average of American Indian and Alaska Native students enrolled in public schools and in special education was 13.8%, I have seen a much larger enrollment in my own class. This middle school had 289 students and roughly 17% of the student population receives special education services. Of the 14 Alaska Native students in my caseload, 10 of them recently came from small Alaska villages and were put in special education for a "Learning Disability". I'm not sure what the protocols were for preventative practices for these students. I don't know what culturally relevant education was used to help these students to avoid being placed in special education. I don't know that the testing protocols used were culturally relevant to them as Alaska Native. That is why I want to know more about the large number of culturally diverse students who are referred, tested, and ultimately placed in special education. I want to learn more about what is being done if anything, in rural schools to prevent students from being over-represented in special education.

Being a special education teacher has allowed me to work with many wonderful regular education teachers who have really tried to teach based on students individuality. All

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those years of being a parent volunteer, I didn't see a lot of academic curricula for teaching students of diverse cultures.

In my class, I use a lot of different programs designed to advance students' academic growth, however, the majority of them are generic with a lot of repetition.

I would like to know what programs are out there specifically designed to teach students with special needs in a culturally relevant way.

1.3. Purpose of this Meta-synthesis

This meta-synthesis with the focus on possible reasons a large percentage of students receiving special educational services have a culturally and linguistically diverse background, has multiple objectives. One objective was to find out if teaching in a culturally and responsive way can impact students academic growth. There is always new ways of knowing and teaching in the world of education, I would like to know if teaching students by using their personal knowledge and background does positively impact them in the future.

A second objective is to find articles that will help me to have a better understanding of the effect of being placed in special education from the students' perspective. How does this affect the self-esteem of these young kids? A third purpose is to discover what educational practices are currently being used that has impacted students of diverse backgrounds. I especially would like to know teachers' personal observations, endeavor's, conflicts, and achievements. A fourth objective is to compile my research into a document that will allow others to benefit from the many authors' who have taken the time to share there perspectives, insight, educational knowledge, and expertise in this area. My final objective in doing this meta-synthesis is to use what I've learned to become a more

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knowledgeable, intuitive, and sensitive teacher to all my students regardless of their cultural background.

2. Methods

2.1 Selection criteria

The fifty articles used for this meta-synthesis met many of the following selection criteria:

1. The articles and books addressed the over-prevalence of culturally diverse students being placed in special education.
2. The pieces were peer reviewed, professional articles typically read by educators.
3. Professionals who had many years experience in special education published the books that were selected.
4. The articles were published between 1980-2013.
5. The articles, which documented over-prevalence of diverse cultures in special education, were compiled from authors who lived in locations around the world.
6. Educators wrote many of those articles.
7. Some articles selected were used to research background information such as previous laws, regulations, and practices pertaining to special education.

2.2 Search procedures

This past summer, the author conducted research on ERIC (Ebscohost database) and found many articles relating to the over-prevalence of culturally diverse students being placed in

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special education. This search subsequently led to ancestral searches that enhanced and provided vital information on new and established research in this subject area.

2.2.1 Database searches

The database index used for this meta-synthesis included ERIC (Ebscohost) education journals. The following Boolean search terms combinations were used which yielded forty-two articles that were selected from the database.

1. (“Culturally relevant education”)
2. (“Culturally relevant education”) AND (“Alaska Native Students”)
3. (“Culturally relevant education”) AND (“minority students”)
4. (“Alaska native indigenous knowledge”)
5. (“Indigenous peoples”) AND (“Alaska” OR “native people”)
6. (“Learning disability diagnosis”)
7. (“Alaska Native Education practice”)
8. (“Teaching”) AND (“experience”) AND (“differentiated learning” OR “Alaska”)
9. (“Teaching experience”) AND (“differentiated learning”) AND (“Alaska special education” “what works”)
10. (“Teaching experience”) AND (“differentiated learning”) AND (“Alaska”) AND (“Special education”)
11. (“Alaska Native children”) AND (“diagnosed with learning disability”)

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12. (“Special education”) AND (“assessment”) AND (“learning disability”)
13. (“Overrepresentation”)
14. (“Alaska Native”) AND (“Special education”)
15. (“Disproportionate representation”) AND (“ethnic”) AND (“special education”)
16. (“RTI History”)
17. (“Tests for special education”)
18. (“Self-esteem”) AND (“impact in special education”)

The various searches yielded forty two articles that met my selection criteria:

(Adams & Adam & Opbroek, 2005; Algozzine, 2005; Berhanu, 2008; Bollmer & Bethel & Mogren & Brauen, 2007; Bradley & Danielson, 2004; Bricker & Clifford & Yavanoff & Frontczak & Waddell & Allen & Hoselton, 2008; Brownell & Sindelar & Kiely & Danielson, 2010; Celinska, 2009; Piechura-Couture & Heins & Mercedes, 2000; Council For Children with Behavioral Disorders, 2013; Daniel & King, 2001; Echevarria & Powers & Elliott, 2004; Fickel, 2012; Fiedler & Chiang & Van Haren & Jorgensen & Halberg & Boreson, 2001; Fitzgerald & Gray & Snowden, 2006; Ford, 2012; Glazzard, 2010; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Jensen & McCrary & Krampe & Cooper, 2004; Kendricks & Arment. 2000; MacMaster & Donovan & MacIntyre, 2002; Malone & Langone, 2008; Mandell & Davis & Bevans & Guevara, 2008; Morrier & Hess & Heflin, 2008; Munsch & Boylan, 2000; Nam & Roehrig & Kern & Reynolds, 2012; National Joint Committee on Learning Disorders, 2013; The National Joint Committee On Learning Disabilities, 2011; Nellis, 2012; Nolen, 2001; Obiakor & Beachum & Williams & McCray, 2001; Reyhner, 2001; Ryan & Dennis, 2000; Skelton, 2004; Skiba & Simmons & Ritter & Gibb & Rausch &

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Cuadrado & Chung, 2008; Sweller & Graham & Bergen, 2012; Thomson, 2012; Tucker, 2001; Valles, 1998; Vandenberg & Emery, 2009; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001; Zirkel, 2009).

2.2.2 Ancestral searches

An ancestral search involves reviewing the reference list of previous publications to locate literature relevant to my topic (Welch & Brownell & Sheridan, 1999). Using the references from other authors, I found eight articles that I included in this meta-synthesis (Barnhardt, 2000; Fierros & Blomberg, 2005; Fitch, 1999; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Kawagley, 2001; Kushman & Barnhardt, 2001; Stotsky, 2006; Thompson, 2012; Vincent & Hawken & Frank, 2012).

2.3 Coding procedures

A coding form was developed to categorize the information in each of the fifty articles referenced (Duke, 2011). The coding form was based on (a) publication type; (b) research design; (c) participants; (d) data sources; and (e) findings.

2.3.1 Publication type

I evaluated and classified each article according to publication type (e.g., research study,

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descriptive article, guide, opinion piece/position paper, review of the literature). *Research studies* employ systematic methods to gather and/or analyze quantitative and/or qualitative data. *Descriptive articles* describe experiences and phenomena but do not employ systematic methods to gather and analyze data. *Guides* recommend specific strategies and/or explain how practitioners might implement particular programs, policies, or curricula, *Opinion pieces/position papers* explain an author's opinion about a particular issue; these articles may support or advocate for particular educational objectives, political views, policy positions, or philosophical ideas. *Reviews of the literature* summarize and synthesize the essential themes of previously published works on a particular topic (Table 1).

2.3.2 Research design

Articles I selected were divided by research design, both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative studies were measured by numerical data from different sources, which shared certain traits, and qualitative studies involved language-based data and analysis. I also used mixed methods, articles that had both quantitative and qualitative data (Table 2).

2.3.3 Participants, data sources, and findings

I identified the participants in each of the studies (e.g. students diagnosed with and without a disability, regular/special education teachers and students, pre-K to adults with disabilities, National statistical data on minority students in special education, participants in a pre-service teaching programs, teachers who taught in rural locations). I also categorized

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case research sources based on observational data, focus groups, surveys, interviews, government agencies, standardized tests, statistical data, and questionnaires. I then compiled the data and summarized the findings (Table 2).

2.4 Data analysis

I used a modified version of the Stevick- Colaizzi- Keen method used by Duke (2011) to study and categorize the articles and research data for this study. For the purpose of this meta-synthesis, I considered statements to be significant when they addressed issues related to (a) Intervention-RtI; (b) over-prevalence and over-representation (c) misdiagnosis (d) self-esteem (e) educational practices (f) teacher educational readiness (g) socio-economic factors (h) state mandated testing (i) increasing population in special education (j) culturally diverse learning styles. I comprised a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping (verbatim) significant statements with (paraphrased) formulated meanings representing my understanding and interpretation of each significant statement. Finally, I categorized the formulated meanings into clusters of data, which included similar and emergent themes. These themes represent the essence and content of the entire body of literature used in this meta-synthesis (Table 3).

3. Results

3.1 Publication type

The fifty articles I selected for the meta-synthesis is listed on table 1. Twenty-one (44%) of the articles I selected were research studies (Bricker & Clifford & Yavonoff & Pretti-Frontcz & Waddell & Allen & Hoselton, 2008; Celinska, 2009; Daniel & King, 2001; Fickel, 2012; Fierros & Blomberg, 2005; Fitch, 2003; Fitzgerald & Gray & Snowden, 2006; Glazzard, 2010; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; MacMaster & Donovan & MacIntyre, 2002; Malone & Langone, 2004; Mandell & Davis & Bevans & Guevara, 2008; Morrier & Hess & Heflin, 2008; Munsch & Boylan, 2008; Nam & Roehrig & Kern & Reynold, 2012; Ryan & Dennis, 2000, Sweller & Graham & Bergin, 2012; Vandenberg & Emery, 2009; Vincent & Tobin & Hawken & Frank, 2012; Wehmeyer & Schwart, 2001). Six of the articles (14 %) were guides (Adams & Adam & Opbrok, 2005; Echevarria & Powers & Elliott, 2004; Jensen & McCrary & Krampe & Cooper, 2004; Kendricks & Arment, 2011; Skelton, 2004; Valles, 1998). Eleven of the articles (23%) were opinion piece/Position Papers (Algozzine, 2005; Barnhardt, 2000; Council For Children with Behavioral Disorders, 2013; Piechura-Couture & Heins & Tichenor, 2013; Ford, 2012; Kawagley, 2001; Obiakor & Beachum & Williams & McCray, 2006; Reyhner & Jacobs, 2002; Skiba & Simmons & ritter & Gibb & Rausch & Cuadrado & Chung, 2008; Stotsky, 2006; Tucker, 2001). Nine of the articles (18%) were descriptive papers (Berhanu, 2008; Brownell & Sindelar & Kiely & Danielson, 2010; Fiedler & Chiang & Van Haren & Jorgensen & Halberg & Boreson, 2008; Kushman & Barnhardt, 2001;

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National Joint Committee on Learning Disorders, 2013; Nellis, 2012; Nolen, 2001; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), 2011; Thomson, 2012). Three of the articles (1%) were Reviews of the Literature (Bollmer & Bethel & Garrison-Mogren & Brauen, 2007; Bradley & Danielson, 2004; Zirkel, 2009).

Table 1

Author(s) & Year of Publication	Publication Type
Adams & Adam & Opbroek, 2005	Guide
Algozzine, 2005	Opinion Piece/ Position Paper
Barnhardt, 2000	Opinion Piece/ Position Paper
Berhanu, 2008	Descriptive Article
Bollmer & Bethel & Garrison-Mogren & Brauen, 2007	Reviews of the Literature
Bradley & Danielson, 2004	Reviews of the Literature
Bricker & Clifford & Yovanoff & Pretti-Frontczak & Waddell & Allen & Hoselton, 2008	Research Study

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Brownell & Sindelar & Kiely & Danielson, 2010	Descriptive Article
Celinska, 2009	Research Study
The Council For Children with Behavioral Disorders, 2013	Opinion Piece/ Position Paper
Piechura-Couture & Heins & Tichenor, 2013	Opinion Piece/ Position Paper
Daniel & King, 2001	Research Study
Echevarria & Powers & Elliott, 2004	Guide
Fickel, 2012	Research Study
Fiedler & Chiang & Van Haren & Jorgensen & Halberg & Boreson, 2008	Descriptive Article
Fierros & Blomberg, 2005	Research Study
Fitch, 2003	Research Study

Table 1-continued

Author(s) & Year of Publication	Publication Type
Fitzgerald & Gray & Snowden, 2006	Research Study
Ford, 2012	Opinion Piece / Position Paper
Glazzard, 2010	Research Study
Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006	Research Study
Hosp & Reschly, 2004	Research Study
Jensen & McCrary & Krampe & Cooper, 2004	Guide
Kawagley, 2001	Opinion Piece/ Position Paper

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Kendricks & Arment, 2011	Guide
Kushman & Barnhardt, 2001	Descriptive Article
MacMaster & Donovan & MacIntyre, 2002	Research Study
Malone & Langone, 2004	Research Study
Mandell & Davis & Bevans & Guevara, 2008	Research Study
Morrier & Hess & Heflin, 2008	Research Study
Munsch & Boylan, 2008	Research Study
Nam & Roehrig & Kern & Reynolds, 2012	Research Study
National Joint Committee on Learning Disorders, 2013	Descriptive Article
Nellis, 2012	Descriptive Article

Table 1-continued

Author(s) & Year of Publication	Publication Type
Nolen, 2001	Descriptive Article
Obiakor & Beachum & Williams & McCray, 2006	Opinion Piece/ Position Paper
Reyhner & Jacobs, 2002	Opinion Piece/ Position Paper
Ryan & Dennis, 2000	Research Study
Skelton, 2004	Guide

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Skiba & Simmons & Ritter & Gibb & Rausch & Cuadrado & Chung, 2008	Opinion Piece/ Position Paper
Stotsky, 2006	Opinion Piece/ Position Piece
Sweller & Graham & Bergen, 2012	Research Study
The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), 2011	Descriptive Article
Thomson, 2012	Descriptive Article
Tucker, 2001	Opinion Piece/ Position Paper
Valles, 1998	Guide
Vandenberg & Emery, 2009	Research Study
Vincent & Tobin & Hawken & Frank, 2012	Research Study
Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001	Research Study
Zirkel, 2009	Reviews of the Literature

3.2 Research design, participants, data-sources, and findings of the studies

Articles I selected were divided by research design, both quantitative and qualitative. I also used mixed methods, articles that had both quantitative and qualitative data. I identified the participants in each of the studies and categorized research sources based on observational data, focus groups, surveys, interviews, government agencies, standardized tests, statistical data, and questionnaires. I then compiled the data and summarized the findings (Table 2).

Table 2

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Bricker & Clifford & Yovanoff & Pretti-Frontczak & Waddell & Allen & Hoselton, 2008	Mixed Methods	The sample for the study was composed of 1,381 children, 719 were ineligible, and the remainder, were eligible for services under IDEA.	Birth date, scores on a developmental screening measure, and the AEPS test scores. The Ages and Stages Questionnaires , Developmental Indicators for	This study reaffirmed that the study conducted by previous research is still valid. The AEPS curriculum based assessment is an established assessment measure; it is an authentic assessment; and it is a comprehensive assessment measure whose out-comes are

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		Participants were between the ages 0-6 with more students being eligible at an older age (3-6).	the Assessment of Learning, and Brigance screens were used. Depending on the child's chronological age, either the AEPS Test for Birth to Three Years (Level-1) or Three to Six Years (Level-2) was completed. Observational data was also collected. The Rasch estimation software Winsteps 3.5 was used.	linked to the intervention process. The limitations of this study were the participants were selected based on availability; a better sample might produce better results. The most important implication of this study is the need for further empirical work focused on determining eligibility for services. Another implication is the need for continued examination of accurate procedures for determining eligibility.
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Table 2 - Continued

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Celinska, 2009	Quantitative	The participants were 82 fourth to seventh grade students from urban and suburban	Narratives were elicited in the context of naturalistic conversation and analyzed using High	Regardless of the learning disability status, African American and Caucasian students produced comparable personal and fictional narratives despite the fact that African-American

		<p>schools located in a Midwest metropolitan area. 28 were Caucasian and 34 were African-American. The mean age was 11.3 years old. Gender was equally represented. All students were categorized as having LD under IDEA.</p>	<p>Point Analysis and Episodic Analysis.</p>	<p>participants demonstrated less developed expressive syntactic and listening comprehension skills than their Caucasian peers. The results of this study pointed out those specific features of narratives produced by early adolescents may be associated with their ethnic/cultural background and/or learning disability.</p>
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Table 2 - Continued

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Daniel & King, 2001	Mixed Method	207 third through fifth grade students from 12 classrooms. Group 1: students from four non-inclusio	Information from the SAT, CBCL, and SEI tests. In addition, a brief parent concerns questionnaire was used to gather data.	Data indicate that students in inclusion classrooms had higher reading achievement and more behavior problems than peers in non-inclusion settings. In fourth grade, non-inclusive students had higher math gain

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		n classrooms. Group 2: 34 students from two inclusion classrooms. Group 3:105 students from six random inclusion classrooms.		scores and higher peer popularity self-esteem scores than did their counterparts in inclusion classrooms. In the fifth grade level, study supported the fact that behavior problems diminished for students in inclusive settings.
Fickel, 2012	Qualitative	Alaska Native Elders from a Rural Alaska Native village and The Alaska Partnership for Teacher Enhancement (APTE) program. 9 Professional Development Schools (PDS) and 53 teachers and teacher aides.	Field note observations, informal field-based interviews, instructional material, and other documents from the four PDS schools. Included were transcripts of follow-up interviews, surveys & essays from participants.	This four-year study focused on teacher professional development and to develop culturally responsive practices. The findings indicate that teachers who are given opportunities to engage with cultural Native Elders in a rural Alaska Native village, using culturally based ways of knowing and learning, have a better understanding of history and culture, thus becoming more effective educators.

Table 2- Continued

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Fierros & Blomberg, 2005	Quantitative	Charter schools from the California Dept. of Education (CADE) between 2002-2003. The	DataQuest from CADE record bank. Two modifications were made to match the state-level California	This study examined the for-profit and non-profit charter schools to better understand whether a charter school's status can lead to bias enrollment patterns for students with

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		participants were from 502 charter schools, 265 of which were from for-profit and 237 were non-profit.	data with the U.S. Office of Civil Rights racial categories, the data from subcategories were combined, and the data was adjusted, subtracting the total number in more than one category.	special needs. Students with special needs represented a larger percentage in for-profit charter schools compared with non-profit charter schools. The data confirmed that students are restricted in both for-profit and non-profit schools; and more white students are likely to attend charter schools.
Fitch, 2003	Qualitative	Over a 6-year period (1995-2001), 11 students who attended urban schools; and whom all had been placed in an inclusive setting as well as a traditionalist / general ed. setting.	1995-1996 formal interviews; 15 written questions. Student interviews. All interviews were interpreted by analyzing data.	This study focused on how students view segregated and inclusive learning environments. Students, who went from inclusive to integrated setting, had a confident sense of self over time. The longer students were in inclusive settings; they took on a more defiant, subcultural identity.

Table 2 - Continued

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Fitzgerald & Gray & Snowden, 2006	Qualitative	Participants (29 men and 16 women). The mean age was 32 years old. 38 participants diagnosed LD and 5 had	Comparison of (WAIS-R) with the (WAIS-III) in individuals with learning	WAIS-III Full-scale scores were significantly lower by over 4 IQ points. Verbal and Performance Scale IQ scores were also significantly lower than the corresponding WAIS-R scores. The shift

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		a borderline disability. 66 service users from Craegmoor Healthcare Services Ltd took part in this study.	disability or borderline learning disability was conducted. All participants completed both tests.	from WAIS-R to WAIS-III means that 66% more people meet criterion A (DSM-IV-TR) for the diagnosis of learning disability and hence this has major resource implications for health service providers.
Glazzard, 2010	Qualitative	9 students, between the ages of 14-15 years old who went to school in the north of England.	Individual student interviews.	The sample size was small and the absence of quantitative data means that the results cannot be evaluated in terms of statistical significance. The author stated that the diagnosis of Dyslexia allowed students the ownership of the label and that had a positive impact on their self-esteem. After the diagnosis, learners' confidence increased and the students were able to differentiate between their specific difficulties and the notion of intelligence.

Table 2 - Continued

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006	Quantitative	The Instructional Consultation Teams (ICT). 22 schools in five districts.	The data included school/ student population according to	Over a 2-year period, the findings indicated that the 13 schools that participated in the ICT method had a decrease in minority student

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		13 schools were selected to participate in a 2-year training. The 9 remaining schools selected and gave comparative data.	race and number of students placed in SpEd yearly. That data was divided into two categories: minority and non-minority students.	evaluations for special education and a decrease in the number of minority students being placed in special education in spite of the increase in minority student enrollment.
Hosp & Reschly, 2004	Quantitative	Number of students from each of the 12 federal race/ethnicity categories: in each of three categories reported (Learning Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Mental Retardation) and the total number enrolled.	Elementary and Secondary schools Civil Rights Compliance Report, 1998 (OCR); U.S. Dept of Ed., 2000). Common Core of data (CCD; National Center for Educational Statistics 2000. District-level achievement data.	This study focused on the impact of academic, demographic, and economic factors to predict being placed in special education; and if academic achievement account for a large variances. For ten of the recognized ethnic groups, academic achievement was not a strong predictor of placement into special education.

Table 2 - Continued

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
MacMaster & Donovan & MacIntyre, 2002	Quantitative	62 students in grades 3-6 from six schools over a three-month	10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale that was converted to	Children reported higher levels of self-esteem following diagnosis. The observations reported here suggest that a

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		period. 26 students had a documented learning disabilities and remaining 36 were selected to give comparative data. Gender categories were equal.	a 7-point Likert-type scale was used to measure self-esteem. This was used as a pre-test and post-test.	broad perspective examining both positive and negative effects of labeling is warranted in learning disability research. This would be useful to parents who want to have their child tested for possible learning deficits. This study would be more valid if there were follow up data with subjects involved in study.
Malone & Langone, 2004	Mixed Methods	37 special education pre-service teachers and 100 general education pre-service teachers were included.	Multiple choice and essay format pre-tests, post-tests, and follow-up tests were administered to general and special education pre-service teachers.	The purpose of this study is to compare the effectiveness of traditional and anchored instruction with general education and special education pre-service teachers. Results showed that pre-service special education teachers scored higher with additional instruction (anchored instruction) than those in the general education population by a ratio of 8:16.

Table 2 - Continued

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Mandell & Davis & Bevens & Guevara, 2008	Mixed Methods	Students between the ages of 6- 18 who had been labeled through the	Medicaid mental health claims from year 2002, students who lived in	Caucasians were more likely to have an IEP. Boys were more likely than girls and black children were less likely than other's

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		behavioral health system with a diagnosis of ADHD.	Philadelphia, PA. Special education records were used to create a unique identifier.	to have an IEP. There were ethnic disparities in IEP services and labeling with children who had diagnosis- ADHD.
Morrier & Hess & Heflin, 2008	Quantitative	Participants were 49 educators from Georgia who taught students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).	Over a 3-month period, data collected via an Internet survey were used. It was imported into the Apache Software Foundation, 2000(SPSS).	Diverse students are overrepresented in specific low incidence categories (autism). The majority teachers were Caucasian women. 20.65% of students were in a general education setting.
Munsch & Boylan, 2008	Qualitative	Partnership: SRSD and Depart of Ed., at APU (Remote Rural Practicum program). In 2005, 13 pre-service teachers participated in remote rural practice teaching experience.	Open-ended pre and post experience questionnaires , pre-service teachers' views. Likert scale post-test. Information gathered was biographical details. The three villages visited were Togiak, New Stuyahok, and Manokotak.	Participants had a better understanding of and empathy for rural students. Teaching in a rural village and working with students and local people as beneficial. Challenges with classroom teaching were; parent/ teacher relationship building, racial/cultural biases, and poverty/poor home life for students.

Table 2 - Continued

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Nam & Roehrig & Kern & Reynolds, 2012	Mixed Methods	35 teachers who all worked in schools on or near	The data came from: 1) The Likert Scale Survey. 2) Open ended	Teachers who scored higher tended to view teaching as a two-way learning process. They used concrete

		Indian reservations. Teachers were in the CYCLES and ICE-Net, a 3-year teacher program.	survey prior to workshops. 3) Semi-structured interviews.	traditional science knowledge from the students. They used traditional science examples to make teaching relevant and build relationships
Ryan & Dennis, 2000	Qualitative	12 participants: six remote locations in Alaska. Each site had a teacher and aide. Criteria was: at least one educator was AK Native; lived in a remote village: part of the REFIP program, UAF.	Questionnaires, permanent products, group audio-conference, in-depth individual interviews, and researcher field notes collected over a 24-month period. Participants identified a student with a low incidence disability to be the focus of efforts to implement fully inclusive classroom instruction.	Findings reflect the need for educators to build upon experiences of individuals, their values, and beliefs in order to support and enhance the sustainable development and implementation of inclusion of persons with disabilities in school and community life.

Table 2 - Continued

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Sweller & Graham &	Quantitative	Australia's New South Wales (NSW)	This study used school enrollment	Statewide aggregates show that indigenous students are

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<p>Bergen, 2012</p>		<p>Education system, approximately 750,615 students per year, over a 13-year period.</p>	<p>data published in NSW/DEC annual reports and statistical bulletins. It was broken into 5 types: a. total enrollment; enrollment in mainstream classrooms; support classes in elementary schools (SC); support classes in secondary schools (SC secondary); and enrollment for schools for special purposes (SSP).</p>	<p>overrepresented in special schools and support classes at both elementary and secondary levels, whereas students in the LBOTE (those students with a language background other than English) category are underrepresented in special schools and support classes at elementary level but overrepresented in secondary school support classes. For indigenous students, the risk of being in a regular setting decreased whereas the risk of being in a SC secondary or SSP setting increased. For LBOTE students, the risk of being in a regular setting increased, whereas the risk of being in SC secondary or SSP settings decreased, showing the opposite trend to that of Indigenous students.</p>
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Table 2 - Continued

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
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<p>Vandenberg & Emery, 2009</p>	<p>Mixed Methods</p>	<p>Three year longitudinal study included 176 children who were diagnosed with a learning disability, 44 participants in a transfer program. Students were in 18 school districts of varying SES in a large Midwestern metropolitan area.</p>	<p>WISC-R (1974), WISC-III (1991), K-BIT. Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery (1977). The Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised (1989)</p>	<p>This study examined the effects of IQ, age of diagnosis, school socioeconomic status (SES) and participation in desegregation programs on the remediation of learning disabilities. Results indicated that IQ and age at diagnosis were significant predictors of remedial success, while school SES and transfer status were not. Students with higher IQ scores, who were identified at an early age, showed greater remedial gains. The results suggest more intensive services and follow-up be given to children with lower IQ.</p>
<p>Vincent & Tobin & Hawken & Frank, 2012</p>	<p>Mixed Methods</p>	<p>The Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) method. 201 schools participated in the study, of those, 46 were middle schools. Four states participated.</p>	<p>School-wide Information System (SWIS) recorded overall school enrollment; data from public schools, and those schools willing to share the information</p>	<p>The study was focused around 4 principle questions. White and Hispanic-American students were underrepresented in office discipline referrals (ODR), while African-American students were over-represented. African-Americans students And Hispanic-Americans were over-represented as getting ODR when in the <i>Check In Check Out</i> (CICO) program.</p>

Table 2 - Continued

Culturally Diverse Students In Special Education

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001	Quantitative	All students enrolled during one of three school years (1992-93, 1993-94, 1994-95) in rural districts in southern U.S.	Conducted a records review to identify students who were admitted to special education under the category of LD or MR.	Of students with learning disabilities, 68.5% were males and 31.5% were females. For students with MR, 65.5% were Caucasian students, African-American's represented 19.8%, Hispanic Students represented 7.9% and Native Americans represented 1.4%.

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3.2.1 Research design

Six of the 21 studies (28.5%) included in this meta-synthesis employed a qualitative research design (Fickel, 2012; Fitch, 2003; Fitzgerald & Gray & Snowden, 2006; Glazzard, 2012; Munsch & Boylan, 2008; Ryan & Dennis, 2000). Eight of the studies (38.2%) used a quantitative research design (Celinska, 2009; Fierros & Blomberg, 2005; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; MacMaster & Donovan & MacIntyre, 2002; Morrier & Hess & Heflin, 2008; Sweller & Graham & Bergen, 2012; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001). Seven of the studies (33.3%) employed a mixed method research design, collecting and analyzing a combination of both quantitative (i.e., numerical) and qualitative (i.e., non-numerical) data (Bricker & Clifford & Yovanoff & Pretti-Fronkczak & Waddel & Allen & Hoselton, 2008; Daniel & King, 2001; Malone & Langone, 2004; Mandell & Davis & Bevans & Guevara, 2008; Nam & Roehrig & Kern & Reynolds, 2012; Vandenberg & Emery, 2009; Vincent & Tobin & Hawken & Frank, 2012).

3.2.2 Participants and data sources

I identified the participants in each of the studies (e.g. students diagnosed with and without a disability, regular/special education teachers and students, pre-K to adults with disabilities, National statistical data on minority students in special education, participants in a pre-service teaching program, teachers who taught in rural locations). I also categorized case research sources based on observational data, focus groups, surveys, interviews, government agencies, standardized tests, statistical data, and questionnaires. I then compiled the data and summarized the findings.

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3.2.3 Findings of the studies

The findings of the twenty-one research studies in this meta-synthesis can be categorized as follows:

1. Pre-service and regular education teachers experiences, struggles, and triumphs when working with culturally diverse students.
2. Tips from pre-service and regular education teachers on a holistic view of teaching practices pertaining to culturally diverse students.
3. The affects of self-esteem and labeling and how it impacts culturally diverse students in special education.
4. Under/over representation of culturally ethnic groups in disability categories.
5. Under/over representation of culturally ethnic groups based on demographics.
6. Possible reasons culturally diverse groups are over-represented to receive special education services.
7. General information about preventative practices, re-visiting current assessment practices that may potentially lead to placement in special education, inclusive settings and the effects it has on students, and enrollment exclusion from charter schools.

3.3 Emergent themes

Seven themes emerged from my analysis of the fifty articles I read for this meta-synthesis. These theme clusters include: 1) Culturally responsive teaching tips; 2) factors and biases that lead to special education enrollment; 3) self-esteem and labeling; 4)

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over and under-representation of culturally diverse students; 5) testing; 6) RtI; 7) rural life struggles and tips for teachers. The findings and results are documented in table 3.

Table 3

Theme Clusters	Formulated Meanings
Culturally responsive teaching tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allow native elders and community members to the class to establish rapport and use cultural knowledge as a tool to educate students. ● Learning and teaching is a holistic process that can't be divided so teachers should also be learners. ● Set the bar high and students will try to reach high, set it low and they don't need to try. ● Parents play a key role when it comes to motivating students to learn. ● Teachers who have direct contact with cultural lives of their students and their families experience a better rapport and relationship than those who do not. ● Use effective teaching practices such as wait time to allow students to process new information. ● Understand that students may not see things the same and adjust your teaching to match (ex: slower pace, quiet demeanor). Utilizing differences is key to understanding. ● Use interdisciplinary curricular (nature and life) to make learning relevant to the student. ● When talking with students, use context cues to establish better communication. ● Honor cultural perspectives. ● Teach a subject in multiple ways and do so with more hands on activities. ● Diverse learners prefer knowledge validity through personal experiences. ● A key to teaching diverse students is to ground them in their own culture and beliefs. ● Reject bad behavior and not the student. ● Focus on student strengths and individuality.

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Factors and biases that lead to special education enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Racism and prejudice play a role in student enrollment in special education.● Socioeconomic background plays a large part in enrollment in special education.● More boys than girls are placed in special education.● Culturally diverse students may experience academic growth at a different age than others.● Gifted and talented students may also have learning disabilities.● Poor learning environments lead to more placements in special education.● Students who are placed in special education are placed there to alleviate teacher problems.● Lack of intervention and quality of instruction impact student enrollment.● Swedish schools reported lack of teaching materials and unreliable assessment.● Exclusionary practices in charter and private schools impact enrollment.● Budget cuts impact enrollment.● Uneducated parents are unable to help their child with school curriculum.● Lack of quality teacher education causes more students to be enrolled in special education.● Gender biases relating to referrals, classification, and placement.● Hearing may be a factor for boys. Studies show that their perceptions when listening are different than girls.● Boys tend to exhibit ADHD traits.● Teachers have higher standards for boys and tolerate underachievement in girls.● Homogeneous teaching practices contribute to referrals.● Students may not share the same values as the school system.● Teaching methods don't match learning styles.● Behavior expectations and language barriers lead to referrals.● Once a referral is made, it is likely that the student will be placed in special education.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There is ethnic mismatch between teachers and students.
<p>Self-esteem and labeling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There is a disconnect between diverse students and predominately white teachers, therefore many students are unsure of the role they should play in school. ● Poor self-esteem and a poor learning environment place diverse learners more often in special education. ● Many diverse students don't seek out others and ask for help and that gives the impression that they are slow learners, therefore, impact self-esteem. ● Students who were diagnosed with dyslexia and learning disabilities stated that they had more self-esteem than before they were diagnosed because they understood that they could get help. ● Labeling can have a positive effect for some, but for others, it can devalue. ● Students with low self-esteem often do not graduate from high school and have difficulty finding good employment as adults. ● Disability labels are often placed on students who were deemed too difficult to teach. ● Students are labeled with a disability for the purpose of exempting them from high stakes testing. ● Parents of students with dyslexia said that they felt a sense of relief after the diagnoses because their child will be helped. ● Students often get low-self esteem because of problems with behavior and academic achievement. ● Being labeled with a disability can be stigmatizing for students. ● When a child is diagnosed, they often have difficulty because peers may view them differently.
<p>Over and under-representation of culturally diverse students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● African Americans are over-represented in all disability categories. ● African Americans are more likely to be diagnosed with MR and ED than other ethnic groups. ● African Americans are over-represented in disciplinary referrals and suspensions. ● Overall, more African American and Hispanic American students are represented in restricted environments.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overall, more diverse students other than African American and Hispanic American students are under-represented in restricted environments. ● Hispanic Americans are over-represented in the LD category. ● Culturally diverse groups are under-represented in gifted and talented. ● Hispanic Americans are under-represented in Special education. ● Hispanic Americans and white students are under-represented with disciplinary referrals. ● Alaska Natives are over-represented in the LD category. ● American Indians are under-represented in ASD. ● More American Indians are diagnosed with a reading disability. ● The chance of an American Indian student being placed in special education when compared to an Asian American student is approximately 75%. ● There is under-representation of Asian/Pacific Islanders in special education. ● Culturally diverse groups are under-represented in categories such as hearing, visual, and orthopedic impairment. ● Australia’s Indigenous students are over-represented in special education and increasing at a faster rate than general enrollment in school. ● Low socioeconomic status is associated with high LD diagnosis. ● As much as 50% of culturally diverse students are diagnosed with ADHD.
<p style="text-align: center;">Testing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educators are aligning teaching practices to State standards to boost state testing scores. ● Most schools academic practices are encompassed around state tests, enrollment in special education bypasses high stakes testing scores. ● Bias test results have placed many ethnic groups in special education. ● A large portion of students referred to special education is based on high stakes test scores.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Further study needs to be done on testing accuracy because many times the tests are scored by teacher biases. ● Testing for admittance into special education should be evaluated annually with focus on testing process and materials. ● Cultural variables more often initiate special education referrals and testing. ● Often when students are tested, they want to please the teacher, therefore, they are scored based on their behavior and not on what they know. ● Parents more often go along with the results of the test scores because they believe these to be valid. ● Language and communication barriers often biased testing results.
<p>RtI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Progress monitoring is key to RtI. ● Intervention programs that have proven to be beneficial are the mentoring and tutoring programs. ● The majority of students chosen for RtI are enrolled in special education. ● A general education teacher and his/her tolerance dictate which students are selected for RtI. ● The lack of cultural responsiveness has led to more students being screened for RtI. ● RtI is not effective because teams don't have the resources, time, and enough experience to affect student academic progress. ● For RtI to be effective, teachers must have expertise in teaching. ● RtI progress monitoring does little to show students academic growth. ● RtI shouldn't be a tool used to determine a disability. ● More long term RtI research should be done to understand the effectiveness of the program. ● Only some states chose to implement RtI intervention. ● African Americans get referrals more often then other groups from RtI. ● Many teachers who did RtI had good intentions, however, they often found themselves stressed from documentation instead.

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Rural life-struggles, and tips for teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Parent involvement and community engagement are important in rural schools.● One of the struggles rural teachers face is the lack of material and professional development to implement programs.● Many teachers didn't know how to teach academic content with a cultural perspective.● The experience of teaching in a rural location gave teachers a better understanding of how to interact with students in a meaningful way.● Teachers who taught special education in rural locations often struggled with teaching students diagnosed with low incidence disabilities because of lack of teaching tools.● Special education teachers felt they needed more planning strategies, technology, and strategies to work effectively with administrative staff.● For many of the participants in rural exchange programs, the experience helped them to have empathy for students who have moved to urban settings.● Isolation was one of the hardest things to deal with for first time teachers moving to rural settings.● Many rural teachers struggled with students' lack of motivation and racial biases.● There needs to be more science content curriculum with a cultural perspective.● Successful teachers who used technology to bridge the gap between rural and urban settings found that students were more successful when they went away for higher learning.● Successful teachers said once they found their niche (something they can contribute), it helped them to gain acceptance in the community.● Teacher found success when they valued each child's cultural identity, rejected the behavior and not the child, and focused on positive traits.● Be flexible and willing to deviate from a learning plan.

4. Discussion

In this section I summarized what I felt were important themes from the fifty articles I read and included in this paper. I made connections to myself as an Athabascan women, professional educator, parent, and a member of a culturally diverse group.

4.1. Culturally responsive teaching tips

We all have culture. As educators, there is no longer the option of treating all students the same. The homogeneous “one-size fits” all teaching practice does not work in today’s society. Our own president Obama acknowledged the fact that the number of immigrants may surpass the number of U.S. citizens over the next 50 years. For teachers, this means we need to learn to be effective teachers with students that do not share our cultural background. For many people, this has to be spelled out in order for them to grasp the concepts. For example, Oscar Kawagley (2001) wrote about using community and family members to help bridge the gap between teachers and culturally diverse students. This concept is rhetorical and overstated, however, it is not being utilized in today’s classrooms. This list of tips is meant for the benefit of us who need to be reminded that good teacher practices such as differential teaching should always come first.

I grew up in a small village 280 miles northwest of Fairbanks. In the summertime we had a population boom of 127 people. In the winter there were normally 97 villagers in Koyukuk. I had difficulty reading and was placed in a class (not special education), called the “remedial group”. In this group, I was excluded from my peers, placed with other students

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(many of whom had behavior problems), and given “easy to read” books. Later in life I came to realize that I didn’t learn to be a better reader from that experience, instead, I learned how to avoid reading.

Feeling like an outsider in a village of Athabascan people by a non-native teacher is something that I never forgot. It is my intent for others to use these tips as guides to help culturally diverse students find acceptance and want to be self-advocates for their own learning.

4.2. Factors and biases that lead to special education enrollment

Why are so many culturally diverse students receiving special education services? Over-representation is a cry that has been heard for over 40 years (Hosp and Reschly, 2004). Recently we had an economic crisis and the education budget was cut. The impact to our educational system is over-crowded classes. Added to this crisis is the fact that teacher job evaluations are directly tied to student high stakes test scores. This has caused many students to be overlooked. Many school districts are exempt from the high stakes test requirements if students are enrolled in special education. That along with gender biases, lack of quality intervention, cultural differences, and homogeneous teaching practices have cause the enrollment numbers to increase.

As a special education teacher, it is my job to make sure my students are given the opportunity to have the same quality education as their peers. I have seen a lot of teachers over the years willingly give up on students who challenge them. For many Students and their families, they don’t share the same values and behaviors as the school system demands.

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This reminds me of a kindergarten student I had a few years back. He was loud! Always shouting instead of talking. Many times I had to remove him from class. I finally decided to go visit his family to talk about possible strategies we could work on to help him fit in better. Upon going into his home, I found that his family was also loud. The cadence and intonation were different than what is generally expected in school. They did not share the same values as the teachers and staff of the school.

There are many reasons why a culturally diverse student is placed in special education. Many times it's warranted. There are times though when the focus for placement isn't based on a student's disability, but rather on the socioeconomic background of that student. For many of these students who live in poverty, they don't have a quality education or opportunities to benefit from our school system. As they fall further and further behind, then they qualify for special education services.

Boys are generally more active than girls. They are rambunctious, whereas, girls tend to be calmer. I remember in the early 1990's when ADHD started becoming popular. My son was five years old at the time. He was a wildcat. Always jumping off things, screaming, running, and saying inappropriate things. I remember his kindergarten teacher sitting me down and asking me if I had a history of ADHD. I had no idea what that meant. She felt that intervention was warranted. I agreed because teachers know best. As the year progressed, I started noticing that my son was often very angry. I had a meeting with his teacher, the principal and the school counselor. I brought my son, and during the meeting the teacher asked him to show me his desk and art projects. Instead he went to the back of the room and sat on a chair next to her desk. It was at that time that I really started looking into

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the type of intervention plan the school had. As a parent I need reassurance that my child is being treated fairly. As a teacher, I need to hold others accountable for insuring every effort is made for student to have success in school.

4.3 Self-esteem and labeling

Being labeled is not always bad. For many students and their families, being diagnosed with a disability has made it easier. They learn that there is an answer for why they have difficulty in school. They learn strategies to help them be more successful. These students feel empowered because they can take ownership of their education.

There are other students who have been stigmatized by having a special education diagnosis. They often feel disgrace and have low self-esteem. Often these students get older and drop out of school. As adults, it is difficult to find gainful employment when you have been labeled with a disability (Thompson, 2012). Having the stigma of being a failure devalues these students self-worth. Many students who come from a poor socioeconomic background experience low self-esteem.

I come from humble beginnings. I was raised in a log cabin along with my siblings (8 girls and 6 boys). Growing up, I didn't have many things I called my own. Often times, other families would give us food and hand-me-down clothes. The first time I had my own room was when started the ninth grade in boarding school in another village. The stigma of being "poor" was a constant negative force in my life and that led to low self-esteem. I made a lot of mistakes and bad choices because I didn't feel that I deserved better.

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As a teacher, I have many students who also have low self-esteem. There is one boy who is always late because he doesn't want to be seen coming into my resource room. I had another student last year who, when sitting in class, used her hair as a shield from her classmates. She literally pushed her hair over her face so others won't look at her. One of the IEP goals I made for her was to learn to speak publically. She was enrolled her in a public speaking class and I worked one-on-one with her the whole year.

I'm glad to report that this year, she is a different person. She has many friends and is more outgoing. I'm not saying in any way, that I was solely responsible for the change. I will say that the team, along with her parent, really did help her to come out of her shell. Having low self-esteem is difficult for some to understand, and there are times when I feel unworthy of what I have in my life. One of the things I take comfort in is that I'm in a place in life that I can help others that are experiencing something that I had to go through.

4.4 Over and under representation of culturally diverse students

There is an over-representation of African American students in inclusive settings in special education. The demographics show a disproportionate representation in all disability categories. They get more disciplinary referrals than other groups. Finally, more African Americans are diagnosed with Mental Retardation and Emotional Disturbance.

Hispanic Americans are also overrepresented in restricted environments, but under-represented in special education. Interestingly enough, that group and Caucasian students are under-represented with disciplinary referrals. I learned that behavior is a factor when being referred for special education. That may explain why African Americans are over-represented and Hispanic Americans are under-represented.

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Alaska Native students are over-represented in the Learning Disability category. I see this with my own students. American Indian students are under-represented in the Autism Spectrum Disorder category. I found it amazing when comparing Asian Americans and American Indians, there is a 75% more likely chance that the latter would be identified as needing special education services.

I was under the impression that all culturally diverse groups are over-represented in special education so imagine my surprise to learn that some cultural groups such as Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are under-represented. Could this be because parents of these students don't feel comfortable with labeling their child with a disability?

In my current caseload of special education students, fifty eight percent are from a culturally diverse background. I had a similar statistics last year, therefore I was under the impression this must be happening all over the world. I was wrong.

As an Alaska Native, I do worry about the number of students referred to special education. Last year a teacher told me she strongly felt that two native boys in her class should be tested. They both had fallen behind in her class and she wanted to give them extra support. There was no mention of any intervention plan. This teacher didn't talk to parents before discussing this with me. It bothers me that someone can simply say the word "referral" and ultimately that means a student will be placed in my class. The reason there is over-representation in special education is because there isn't enough qualified teachers who know how to use cultural values to educate students.

4.5 Testing

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In today's educational system, testing is a part of life. Students are often referred to special education because of high stakes tests scores. For students who take these tests, the protocols are often not culturally relevant and biased. This sets them up for failure. Tests given, even in the best environment, are often biased because the test giver is human. As humans, we all pre-judge and have unique perspectives that inadvertently bias everything we do. It is important that the tests we use to place students in special education are updated annually and are applicable to all cultural groups.

As a parent, I hate that my daughter's future depends on her SBA test scores from last year. We have gotten to the point where we have to test everything. Students are subjected to assessments to show progress. If they aren't progressing enough, then they have to take another test to show why. I understand the importance of using test scores to demonstrate accountability for student progress. I have to ask, are these tests helping students academically? Are they benefiting students in any way? More often than not, tests are used to label students. They will be highly proficient, proficient, or not proficient.

At the school where I work, a team consisting of teachers, the principal and school counselor make a list of all the students who are not proficient (based on high-stakes test scores) to determine which students will need extra support and intervention. Interventions consist of extra time to do homework and modifying student grades. If intervention doesn't work, then that student is referred to special education for more testing.

As a special education teacher I find intervention a joke. Tests are written with a certain demographic in mind and the other cultural groups are excluded. Still these tests

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carry a lot of weight to determine which students are successful and which students are not proficient.

In my job, I use the Woodcock Johnson III test protocol to test students for services. What I've noticed is the test maker used a lot of unique names in the test samples. For example a test may read: "Juan and Jesus went to the store". It makes me laugh because it almost feels like they are trying too hard to be culturally relevant and yet the test questions themselves aren't applicable to that cultural group.

As a parent, I have to admit, my daughters test scores are very important to me. They let me know that she's doing what she needs to be successful. When she tests well, I'm very proud, and when she tests poorly, I work with her teachers to help her. Even though as an educator, I know that these tests are often biased, I still want to believe that they are valid. I think the parents of my students also feel the same way I do.

4.6 RtI

The Response to Intervention (RtI) programs is used to determine which students should be placed in special education. Not all the U.S. states chose to initiate RtI in their school systems. The key to successful RtI is monitoring progress. Intervention programs like the mentoring and tutoring programs has shown a lot of success to keep students from being place in special education.

RtI programs require time, resources, and teacher expertise to be successful. Often the lack of culturally responsive teaching practices makes RtI ineffective. RtI does little to show student academic growth instead it is a tool used to determine a disability.

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Teachers who initially used RtI had good intentions, however, they found that they spent a lot of time with documentation and not academically helping their students. More long term RtI research should be done to understand the effectiveness of the program.

More students selected for RtI are chosen based on behavior. More African American students are placed in special education based on RtI referrals. General education teachers who have low tolerance for student inappropriate behaviors tend to refer them more often to RtI.

I remember when RtI was popular in school. I would spend hours testing my students using the DIBEL's program.

As a new elementary teacher, I felt that I was making a difference that would impact these students long-term. After the first year, I felt that the only thing I managed to do was kill a lot of innocent trees.

RtI program I used was important because it documented my student's reading fluency, but it did absolutely nothing to advance my students' academic growth.

RtI was originally intended to put a support structure in place that required collecting data. This data was then supposed to be interpreted by a team of educators that would then stem intervention strategies. That along with family support would help students to become more proficient in school. The only thing I did that first year was collect data.

The disappointment I felt toward RtI that first year didn't improve as time went on. RtI takes a lot of time, resources, and collaboration. Even if I had that back then, my focus was more on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) high stakes testing scores because my job was

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on the line. Even though NCLB has been replaced with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), teachers today are still struggling with this same issue.

I think in theory, the RtI program was a good idea. On paper, it looks like something that would definitely benefit all students. However, realistically there is just not enough administrative support to make it work.

I don't think the RtI plan I use at work is keeping students from being referred to special education. All the students who have been referred to me for testing were admitted into special education. I believe that RtI should be reevaluated and implemented with strong educational support. It should be mandated in all school districts, and more than one RtI strategy should have been tried before students are referred for special education services.

4.7 Rural life struggles and tips for teachers

Teachers who teach in rural villages have many struggles and tribulations. For some, the isolation alone sends them packing their bags back to the city. For others, they have used their struggles as a tool for growth. They have learned to use parents, community members, and technology to bridge the gap between themselves and their students. These teachers use their students' cultural perspective to teach academic content. They do so by teaching these concepts in many different ways.

Experienced teachers are successful because they find their "niche" (Skelton, 2004), something that would benefit the community and help them gain acceptance. They also valued their students' cultural beliefs and supported those beliefs by implementing them into their teaching practices. They rejected bad behavior but didn't reject the child doing

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those behaviors. Only focusing on the positive. Teachers who find success have done so in spite of the lack of material and professional development opportunities.

There are rural exchange programs implemented by college institutions that are meant to give new teachers the opportunity to experience rural life and the cultural uniqueness of rural people. The students who participated in these programs said the experience made them more understanding of, and empathy for, native students by allowing them to interact in a more meaningful way. Many of these participants also said they struggled with students who were not motivated to learn. Some also said that they felt racial bias from students, staff, and community members. Finally they stressed the need for more culturally relevant material, especially for math and science.

Special education teachers in rural locations struggled with teaching students with low incidence disabilities because they didn't have enough teaching tools.

They also wrote they didn't have enough planning time and administrative support. Finally they felt that there should be more professional development.

I really wanted to learn about experiences of other teachers who taught in rural villages because I plan to move back to my Alaska Village someday. When I moved to Fairbanks 29 years ago, I had only planned to stay and get my degree from UAF. Although many years have passed, I haven't changed my mind about going home and teaching in my Athabascan community.

When I was getting my bachelors degree in elementary education, I was a part of a rural exchange program through the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. I went to Newtok, an Inupiaq village northwest of Bethel.

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The school taught pre-K through high school. I remember that all, but one, of the teachers were Caucasian, and those teachers were hired right out of college. The teacher who had been there the longest was there for three years. There was a high turnover rate of teachers at that school. I met a girl from Wisconsin who had been there a few months and did not plan to come back the next year. She said she missed her family. Isolation is definitely something that makes teachers not want to teach in rural villages.

Overall, I learned a valuable lesson, I learned that in order to feel more accepted, I needed to go into the community and meet some people, which I did. I was co-teaching a sixth grade class and I just happened to run into one of my students after school at the community store. I asked her if I could walk home with her and meet her parents. I was nervous when I asked, but I knew the only way I could benefit from the experience was to get out of my comfort zone.

After meeting her parents and grandmother, I was invited to have tea. It was a wonderful experience because I was made to feel so welcome. The next evening, I felt even more accepted when they came to the school to teach the students dancing and singing. They called me over and invited me to sit with them.

I'm very excited to be moving home. I know there will be days that I may feel very isolated from the rest of the world, but I know that I can also find ways to contribute something positive to my community.

Learning about rural life, it's trials, tribulations, and triumphs from teachers who have taught in rural villages is something that I really need to know in order to be successful

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myself when I decide to move back home. I need to know what strategies were used that benefited students and the community.

5. Conclusion

Are culturally diverse students over-represented in special education? In this meta-synthesis this author has been trying to answer this question. I've learned that many cultural groups are over-represented. African Americans are over-represented on referrals to special education and placement in special education. Other cultural groups are over-represented in specific disability categories and under-represented in others. Some groups like Pacific Islanders and Asian students are under-represented in special education.

There were many authors who wrote about possible reasons why there are so many culturally diverse students being placed in special education. Some stated that it was because general education teachers could not teach children that were unlike them. Others said that there was not enough culturally relevant material.

Many wrote about testing biases and large class sizes. Gender biases along with racism and prejudice were mentioned as possible reasons. This author believes all these reasons are valid. I also learned of many tips from teachers about teaching strategies and ideas that seem to work to help bridge the gap between culturally diverse students and predominately white teachers.

Using a holistic approach where teachers and students are learners as well as teachers was mentioned. Many teachers wrote about how important it is to get parents involved with student learning, others also wrote about inviting elders and community members to help teach diverse learners. Honoring cultural perspectives was mentioned as

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important. These and many other strategies mentioned will impact the number of culturally diverse students being placed in special education. Students placed in special education often experience low self-esteem when they are labeled with a disability.

I was surprised when I read that being labeled as needing special education services also benefited some students. Students along with their parents said they felt a sense of empowerment when they found out their child had dyslexia and other learning disabilities. They used the diagnosis to help learn strategies and get extra support, thus taking charge of their own learning. Others experienced feeling disgrace and isolated from peers. Programs like Response to Intervention (RtI) were initially developed to help students before they needed special education services.

RtI was put in place to insure that students have opportunities to get extra support if they are at risk to fail in school. Many authors wrote about the pros and cons of the program. Some said it didn't work because students were only being tested and not helped. Others stated that more research should be done to understand the effectiveness of the preventative programs such as this one. I agree that the parameters of the RtI program are sound and could potentially be effective. There should be clear guidelines and administrative support for any preventative program in order for it to work with culturally diverse students.

Being an Athabaskan woman has placed me in a "minority" group on many levels. The things I have to deal with are gender biases, racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Over the years I have learned to ignore people who try to use those things to diminish who I am. My culturally diverse students don't know how to do that. I chose to go into special education because I want to help my students be successful in life as well as in school. I feel

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the over-representation of even one cultural group in special education is enough to make me want to do all I can to change that and to make a difference.

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