

THE ROLE OF TEACHER BIAS IN THE DISPROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION OF CLD STUDENTS IN  
SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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The Role of Teacher Bias in the Disproportionate Representation of Culturally  
and Linguistically Diverse Students in Special Education Programs  
A Meta-Synthesis

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Teaching in  
Special Education degree at the University of Alaska Southeast

RECOMMENDED: \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Abstract

This meta-synthesis of the literature on the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs examines the extent to which teacher bias impacts that disproportion. The factors that contribute to culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students being overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in gifted education are complex and have deep social and political roots. One such root is that of cultural bias that may be exhibited by teachers working with students whose cultural backgrounds vary from their own. Examining how this bias can impact ways that educators interact with minority students, and how it may affect the assessment and referral of CLD students to special education will help to illuminate ways in which practicing educators can work towards alleviating this bias.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background Information

Merriam Webster's dictionary defines the term "normal" as:

1. conforming to the standard or the common type; usual; not abnormal; regular; natural.
2. serving to establish a standard.
3. *Psychology*.
  - a. approximately average in any psychological trait, as intelligence, personality, or emotional adjustment.
  - b. free from any mental disorder; sane.

Who is considered a "normal" American? 100 years ago, normal was someone who came from a Caucasian, middle-class background. Today, although American society is exponentially more diverse than it was a century ago, the concept of what constitutes a "normal" American remains largely unchanged. Citizens who come from backgrounds of the historical, majority culture remain as the group against which others are measured, compared, and expected to conform. Davis (2006) asserts that "the concept of normal pushes humanity towards the average as ideal", thus setting the expectation for all Americans, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, to measure up to the dominant culture's values and expectations (as cited in Annamma, Boele, Moore, & Klinger, 2013, pp. 1278).

American history has repeatedly demonstrated the belief that people from CLD backgrounds are "abnormal". This abnormality and deviance from the majority culture has been recognized as a deficiency that thus identifies these populations as inferior. Through practices including slavery, the three-fifths compromise, the systematic extermination of Native

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Americans, and the Jim Crow era, Americans have consistently demonstrated their beliefs that people of color are abnormal (Annamma, et al., 2013).

While our country has come a long way from the since the days of slavery and segregation, racism is by no means absent from our society. Racist beliefs, attitudes, and practices are institutionalized within American culture, and thus within our educational system (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, & Wu, 2003). In schools, the effects of institutionalized racism are often exhibited through the use of the deficit model – a model by which CLD students are viewed as defective based on their differences from their majority culture peers, instead of being recognized for their unique perspectives and strengths. Although norms regarding what behaviors are considered appropriate vary across cultures, educators tend to judge students' actions through a narrow, white, mainstream lens (Klinger, Artiles, Kozelski, Harry, Zion, Tate, Zamora Duran, & Riley, 2005). Thus, the varied and distinct values, beliefs, and norms of CLD students become incompatible with school culture (Irvine, 2012) and students are identified as abnormal, flawed, and problematic.

This mismatch between home culture and school culture contributes to the disproportionate representation of minority populations in special education programs, a problem that has been recognized as a concerning, complex, and controversial issue for decades. It is a problem with multiple contributing factors, all of which are all linked together in a complicated and challenging puzzle. Some of the factors which may influence the disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education may include, but are not limited to, teacher bias, test and assessment bias, poverty and demographic factors, special education processes,

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inequity in general education, issues of behavior management, and cultural mismatch/cultural reproduction (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch, Cuadrado, & Chung, 2008).

The issue of disproportionate representation of CLD populations in special education includes both the overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs, as well as the underrepresentation of this same group in gifted learning programs. Important to understand in regards to the overrepresentation of CLD students in special education programs is that the categories of Cognitive Impairment (CI), Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD), and Learning Disability (LD), are those in which the highest rates of disproportionate representation are found and are also those in which eligibility criteria is based on clinical judgment (Harry & Klinger, 2007). Overrepresentation is found almost exclusively in “soft”, or high-incidence, disability categories (LD, EBD, and CI) and is not found in “hard”, or low-incidence, disability categories which include auditory, visual, or orthopedic impairments (Donovan & Cross, 2002, as cited in Klinger, et al., 2005). The low-incidence, “soft”, disability categories of LD, EBD, and CI are more socially determined and have significant room for subjectivity and bias in the assessment and referral process, whereas the identification of disabilities in the “hard” disability categories are based on biologically verifiable conditions (Harry, et al., 2007). It is not hard to imagine various ways in which the behaviors, attitudes, or learning styles of CLD students could be misinterpreted by teachers and cause them to refer these students for special education.

Numerous studies and data analysis provide statistics that clearly show that minority students, especially African-Americans, are represented in higher proportion in special education than in their proportion in the general student population. African American students,

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particularly males, are overrepresented in the disability categories of LD, CI, and serious EBD, while students from Hispanic backgrounds are underrepresented in the categories of CI and EBD and overrepresented in the LD category (Salend, et al., 2002). African American students are nearly twice as likely to be identified as “educable mentally retarded” than their Caucasian peers, and 1.5 times as likely to be identified as EBD (Harry, et al., 2007). Native American students are almost 1.5 times more likely to be identified as having a specific learning disability than other students (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011). Asian American and European American students tend to be underrepresented in their identification in all three categories. Interestingly, Caucasian students are 1.5 times more likely to be identified as autistic when compared with all other students (Ahram, et al., 2011). Further, Hispanic, American Indian, and African American students are underrepresented in gifted education programs while Asian American and European American students are overrepresented in these programs (Salend, et al., 2002). A study by Meier, Stewart, and England (1989) found that white students were 3.2 times more likely to be placed in a gifted education classroom than black students (as cited in Artiles & Trent, 1994).

Not only are more students from CLD backgrounds placed in special education, they are also more likely to be placed in more restrictive environments. Research has found that even when students have the same disability label, minority students are more likely to be placed in segregated classrooms than are their white peers (Annamma, et al., 2013). When students are placed in these more restrictive environments, they lose access to the general education curriculum and may be limited in their overall educational experience.

While the issue of the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education has been extensively studied and widely debated, the root of the problem is largely undetermined

and establishing methods and approaches for addressing the imbalance has been complicated and relatively unsuccessful. The problem is deeply ingrained in an educational system flawed with institutional racism and a political culture that continues to deter positive and effective change. However, one aspect that influences disproportionality and that can be affected by all educators is the impact of teacher bias.

There is a wealth of research and discussion about how the personal biases of teachers may impact the way that students are treated based upon their cultural backgrounds. In an educational field dominated by teachers from middle-class, Caucasian backgrounds it is imperative that all educators reflect upon what this means when working with today's diverse student population. By no means do I intend to imply that all teachers exert racially founded bias in their teaching practices, only that teaching and learning is culturally bound and being able to reflect upon one's personal cultural lens is a task that requires hard work and dedication from every individual. Educators must acknowledge the ways in which their own cultural identities and experiences have constructed their attitudes, beliefs, teaching practices, and interactions with students and families (Shealey, McHatton, & Wilson, 2011).

### *1.2 Author's beliefs and experiences*

The majority of my experiences working in the field of education have been working with students experiencing poverty and homelessness. As many demographic statistics about our country demonstrate, this low-SES population is also very culturally and linguistically diverse. During my experiences working for the Anchorage School District's Child in Transition Project (CIT) and Migrant Education Program, I worked with students from cultural backgrounds including Alaska Native and American Indian, Hmong, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, African

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American, Caucasian, Asian American, Sudanese, Somali, and others. According to the Anchorage School District website, minority students in the district comprise more than 50 percent of the student population.

As I work towards my Masters in Special Education, I anticipate and look forward to working with students from both low-income and CLD backgrounds. For this reason, I believe that a deeper understanding about the complex problem of the disproportionate representation of CLD in special education programs is necessary for someone entering the field of special education. I am hopeful that researching this topic will assist me in developing the skills that will allow me to participate in a more critical analysis of the cultural factors that may lead to the over referral and misdiagnosis of CLD students in various disability categories.

Some of my coursework during my master's program has touched the challenges that may be present in connecting with CLD populations and on methods of culturally responsive teaching to create successful learning opportunities for all students. The knowledge that I have gained in my university courses, as well as the research I have completed as a part of this meta-synthesis, has led me to question some of the methods that are currently in place for identifying, referring, and placing students in special education programs. Is it possible that the same tests and assessment methods used to evaluate students from the majority culture can yield fair and correct interpretations of the abilities of minority cultures? In what ways do the cultural values of educators impact the way that they interpret the behaviors of children who are different from them? Is it possible to design methods that are not influenced by the cultural beliefs of the assessor?

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The reality in the American educational system is that although our student population is growing more and more diverse, the demographics of the teaching population are largely stagnant. The National Center for Educational Statistics states that 83.5% of school teachers in the United States are Caucasian and 84% are female. It is through the lens of the majority, white culture that many CLD students are viewed, and through which (whether consciously or unconsciously) many educators form opinions based on their own prejudices and interpretations of “normal”.

While most white educators would fervidly deny any racist beliefs or prejudices, and especially that these beliefs might sneak in to their teaching philosophies and practices, many might also deny the social advantage or dominance that their skin color has brought them and their Caucasian students. In her essay about white privilege, author Peggy McIntosh states that as a white woman, she never viewed herself as a racist because she was taught that racism was only something that put others at a disadvantage or was exhibited by “individual acts of meanness by members of [her] group”. Like most people, McIntosh was never taught to see one of racism’s corollary aspects - white privilege, “the invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance...” (1988).

I think that this concept is important to consider as a white educator working with diverse populations because it carries implications about the way that I may interpret the skills and behaviors that my students exhibit. Acknowledging that white privilege exists should not mean holding students of color to lower expectations, only recognizing that they may require a different path with different tools to meet the same high expectations as their Caucasian peers.

In an ideal world, all educators would take a strengths based perspective when observing and assessing students. Unfortunately, this is not the model that is universally used in our educational system, or on a larger scale, in our society as a whole. The social implications of this issue are enormous and mirror much larger issues in American society. Unfortunately, both inside schools as well as outside, the deficit model has become institutionalized. Too often students are expected to perform according to white, middle-class norms, and when this unrealistic and inappropriate expectation is not met, students are identified as having a fault, defect, or disability, rather than being recognized for their unique perspectives, assets, and strengths. These students are often mislabeled with emotional and behavioral problems, or with learning or other intellectual disabilities and placed on educational tracks that often negatively affect their ability to reach their full potential.

Some educators and researchers believe that the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education is a sign of our country's persistent racism and our educational system upholding the "separate but equal" doctrine. In a position paper of the Association of Black Psychologists, authors Codrington and Fairchild (2012) argue that the overrepresentation of minorities in special education is a symptom of "subtle and sophisticated" racial discrimination which continues to deny minority students access to equal educational opportunities. Supporting this argument, in an analysis of urban school failure, Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum (2005) refer to the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education as symptom of the "unfinished dream of integration".

In reviewing literature on the subject of the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education I hope to develop knowledge, insight, and skills that will support

my ability to conduct accurate, unbiased, and just assessments of all students that I interact with as a teacher. With a better understanding of the multiple factors that contribute to the biased representation of certain populations in special education, I hope that my students will have better opportunities to meet their full potential, that families will receive the support they need, and that my colleagues and I will question cultural factors that influence the interpretation and categorization of students in our classrooms and schools.

My purpose in conducting this literature review is to identify and analyze the factors that contribute to the disproportionate representation of CLD populations in special education, specifically the ways in which teacher bias may contribute to the imbalance. Further, I hope to identify the ways in which I, as a professional educator, can have a positive impact on this multifaceted issue and not contribute to any further misidentification of students. With this meta-synthesis, I hope to investigate the following research questions:

1. What factors contribute to the disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education?
2. In what ways can the cultural bias of teachers and educators affect the assessment, referral, and identification of students for special education programs?
3. What methods and techniques can educators use to ensure that they are interpreting students' skills and behaviors within an unbiased cultural context?

### *1.3 Purpose of this meta-synthesis*

This meta-synthesis, which focused on the impact of teacher bias in the disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education, had multiple purposes. One purpose was to review journal articles related to the disproportionate representation of minorities in special

education. A second purpose was to review journal articles related to the various social, cultural, and political causes that contribute to this disproportionate representation. A third purpose was to more closely examine the extent to which teacher bias affects the assessment and referral process for minority students. A fourth purpose was to identify strategies and methods for working with CLD populations that will alleviate over- and under-referral of these students to special education and gifted programs. My final purpose in conducting this meta-synthesis was to identify significant themes that emerged from these articles, and to connect these themes in a foundation of understanding that will guide me in later teaching practices with CLD students.

## **2. Methods**

### *2.1. Selection criteria*

The 41 journal articles included in this meta-synthesis met the following selection criteria:

1. The articles explored issues related to the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education; and/or
2. The articles explored teacher bias in assessment and identification practices of students in special education.
3. The articles were published in peer-reviewed journals related to the field of education.
4. The articles were published between 1977 and 2014.

### *2.2. Search procedures*

Database searches and ancestral searches were conducted to locate articles for this meta-synthesis.

#### *2.2.1 Database Searches*

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I conducted Boolean searches within the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC, Ebscohost), using specific search terms:

1. “disproportionate representation” AND “special education”
2. “disproportionate representation” AND “special education” AND “minority”
3. “disproportionate” AND “special education” AND “minority”
4. “over representation” AND “special education”
5. “overrepresentation” AND “special education”
6. “teacher bias” AND “special education”
7. “African American” AND “special education”
8. “special education” AND “proportion” AND “minority”
9. “disability studies” AND “special education” and “disproportionate”

These data base searches yielded a total of 35 articles that met my selection criteria (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011; Anderson & Goldberg, 1991; Annamma, Boele, Moore, & Klingner, 2013; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Ashby, 2012; Bal, Sullivan, & Harper, 2013; Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Coulter, 1996; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Echevarria, Powers, & Ellit, 2004; Fielder, Chiang, Van Haren, Jorgensen, Halberg, & Boreson, 2008; Ford, 2012; Gage, Gertsen, Sugai, & Newman-Gonchar, 2013; Goodman & Webb, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2007; Hosterman, Jitendra, & DuPaul, 2008; Irvine, 2012; Klingner, Artiles, Kozleski, Harry, Zion, Tate, Duran, & Riley, 2005; Ladner & Hammons, 2001; Linney, 2005; Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2012; Morrier & Gallagher, 2011; Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012; Serwatka, Deering, & Grant, 2005; Shealey, McHatton, & Wilson, 2011; Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch, Cuadrado, & Chung, 2008; Skiba,

Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, & Wu, 2003; Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson & Wu, 2006; Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Sullivan, 2011; Sweller, Graham, & Van Bergen, 2012; Talbott, Fleming, Karabatsos, & Dobria, 2011; Waitoller, Artilles, & Cheney, 2010; Zucker & Prieto, 1977).

### 2.2.3 *Ancestral Searches*

An ancestral search involves reviewing the reference lists of previously published works to locate literature relevant to one's topic of interest (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999). I conducted ancestral searches using the reference lists of the previously retrieved articles. These ancestral searches yielded 6 additional articles that met the selection criteria (Elhowens, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Gottlieb, Gottlieb, & Trongone, 1991; Knotek, 2003; McIntosh, 1988; Salend, Duhaney, & Montgomery, 2002; Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000).

### 2.3. *Coding procedures*

I used a coding form to categorize the information presented in each of the 41 articles. This coding form was based on: (a) publication type; (b) research design; (c) participants; (d) data sources; and (e) findings of the studies.

#### 2.3.1. *Publication types*

Each journal article was evaluated and classified according to publication type (e.g., research study, theoretical work, descriptive work, opinion piece/position paper, guide, annotated bibliography, review of the literature). *Research studies* use a formal research design to gather and/or analyze quantitative and/or qualitative data. *Theoretical works* use existing literature to analyze, expand, or further define a specific philosophical and/or theoretical assumption. *Descriptive works* describe phenomena and experiences, but do not disclose particular methods for attaining data. *Opinion pieces/position papers* explain, justify, or recommend a particular

course of action based on the author's opinions and/or beliefs. *Guides* give instructions or advice explaining how practitioners might implement a particular agenda. An *annotated bibliography* is a list of cited works on a particular topic, followed by a descriptive paragraph describing, evaluating, or critiquing the source. *Reviews of the literature* critically analyze the published literature on a topic through summary, classification, and comparison.

### 2.3.2. *Research design*

Each empirical study was further classified by research design (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods research). *Quantitative* research utilizes numbers to convey information. Instead of numbers, *qualitative* research uses language to explore issues and phenomenon. *Mixed methods* research involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to present information within a single study.

### 2.3.3 *Participants, data sources, and findings*

I identified the participants in each study (e.g., students with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse students with and without disabilities, teachers of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, teachers of students in special education). I also identified the data sources that were analyzed for each study (e.g., interviews, observations, surveys, standardized tests). Finally, I summarized the findings of each study (Table 2).

**Table 1**

<b>Author(s) &amp; Year of Publication</b>	<b>Publication Type</b>
Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011	Study
Anderson & Goldberg, 1991	Guide
Annamma, Boele, Moore, & Klingner, 2013	Descriptive Article
Artiles & Trent, 1994	Descriptive Article
Ashby, 2012	Descriptive Article
Bal, Sullivan, & Harper, 2013	Study
Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005	Descriptive Article
Codrington & Fairchild, 2012	Descriptive Article
Coulter, 1996	Study
Coutinho & Oswald, 2000	Descriptive Article
Echevarria, Powers, & Elliot, 2004	Descriptive Article
Elhowens, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005	Study
Fielder, Chiang, Van Haren, Jorgensen, Halberg, & Boreson, 2008	Guide
Ford, 2012	Descriptive Article
Gage, Gertsen, Sugai, & Newman-Gonchar, 2013	Literature Review
Goodman & Webb, 2006	Study
Gottlieb, Gottlieb, & Trongone, 1991	Study
Harry & Klingner, 2007	Descriptive Article
Hosterman, Jitendra, & DuPaul, 2008	Study
Irvine, 2012	Descriptive Article
Klingner, Artiles, Kozleski, Harry, Zion, Tate, Duran, & Riley, 2005	Descriptive Article
Knotek, 2003	Study
Ladner & Hammons, 2001	Study

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Linney, 2005	Study
Mcintosh, 1988	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2012	Study
Morrier & Gallagher, 2011	Study
Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012	Descriptive Article
Salend, Duhaney, & Montgomery, 2002	Guide
Serwatka, Deering, & Grant, 2005	Descriptive Article
Shealey, McHatton, & Wilson, 2011	Descriptive Article
Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000	Study
Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch, Cuadrado, & Chung, 2008	Descriptive Article
Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, & Wu, 2003	Study
Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson & Wu, 2006	Study
Sullivan & Bal, 2013	Study
Sullivan, 2011	Study
Sweller, Graham, & Van Bergen, 2012	Study
Talbott, Fleming, Karabatsos, & Dobria, 2011	Study
Waitoller, Artilles, & Cheney, 2010	Literature Review
Zucker & Prieto, 1977	Study

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**Table 2**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Ahrum, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011	Mixed methods	Teachers and administrators within two suburban school districts in New York state.	Annual district demographic data, special education classification data, and referral data. Also, evaluations, focus groups and interviews, surveys of teachers and administrators, and analysis of documents related to district policies and practices.	Various root causes of racial/ethnic disproportionality in special education were present, with two key causes across both districts. First, deficit thinking related to conceptions of race and socioeconomic status drove the decision to refer. Second, there are inadequate institutional safeguards to prevent referrals and to provide teachers with assistance in meeting the needs of struggling learners.
Bal, Sullivan, & Harper, 2013	Mixed methods	All students enrolled in the Flen School District in Wisconsin during the 2006, 2008, and 2010 school years (n=24,218, n=24,268, and n=24,294, respectively).	Quantitative data gathered from enrollment data from Flen School District. Qualitative data gathered from meetings, participant observations, document review, and communications with the district Educational Services Leadership Team.	Students who were African American, American Indian, receiving free or reduced lunch, or who were male had a higher risk of being identified as having a disability than other students. African American students were twice as likely as white students to be identified for special education. American Indian students were 2 to 3 times more likely to receive special education services than white students.

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Coulter, 1996	Quantitative	State-wide student population for one state during 1993-1994 school years.	General student population data gathered from reports by the Office of Research and Development. Special education count derived from state's computer-based tracking system.	42.4% of the 66 local educational agencies (LEAs) included in the study showed disproportionate representation of ethnic minorities in special education. 93.9% of the LEAs showed disproportion in the "subjective" disability categories of LD, EBD, and CI. 89.4% of LEAs showed disproportionate underrepresentation of African-American students in gifted education programs.
Elhowens, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005	Quantitative	207 elementary school teachers from one school district in a large Midwestern city.	Teachers were given descriptive vignettes and asked to respond using a 6-point Linkert scale.	Student ethnicity does make a difference in teachers' referral decisions.
Goodman & Webb, 2006	Quantitative	66 students in grades 3 and 4 enrolled in a large, suburban elementary school in a low socioeconomic neighborhood in the Southwest who were referred for special education due to suspected reading disabilities.	Archival Texas Academic Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading test data from students' cumulative folders.	There was no apparent gender or ethnic bias in referrals made by participating teachers. Students with LEP were less likely to be referred for special education.

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<p>Gottlieb, Gottlieb, &amp; Trongone, 1991</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>439 pupils referred for special education (328 referred by teachers and 111 referred by parents).</p>	<p>Archival school records</p>	<p>White parents were more likely than minority parents to refer their children. Teachers were more likely to refer minority students and, further, were more likely to refer them for behavioral rather than academic reasons.</p>
<p>Hosterman, Jitendra, &amp; DuPaul, 2008</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>241 students enrolled in grades 1 through 4 in public schools in eastern Pennsylvania.</p>	<p>Direct observation</p>	<p>Ratings of ADHD symptoms by Caucasian teachers are not biased against ethnic minority students.</p>
<p>Knotek, 2003</p>	<p>Qualitative</p>	<p>Two elementary schools in a poor, rural Carolina Piedmont community.</p>	<p>Participant observation, transcription of Student Study Team meetings, collection of documents, and interviews.</p>	<p>Bias can enter pre-referral process when students are either from low-SES families or construed to have behavior problems, especially in problem-identification and intervention stages. This may contribute to the overrepresentation of African American students in referrals for and placement in special education.</p>

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<p>Ladner &amp; Hammons, 2001</p>	<p>Qualitative</p>	<p>Selected school districts in California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, New York, Oregon, Texas, and Wisconsin.</p>	<p>Secondary analysis of county and district level data.</p>	<p>The data indicate that minority students are treated differently in predominantly white districts than in predominantly minority districts.</p>
<p>Linney, 2005</p>	<p>Mixed methods</p>	<p>129 school psychologists with at least five years experience working in the Southeastern region of the United States.</p>	<p>Survey</p>	<p>The cross-cultural competence of school psychologists had a strong influence on psycho-educational decisions for referred African American students. The most influential variable on the placement of African American students into special education was cultural disadvantage. The two factors considered to be least influential on disproportionate representation were biased referrals from teachers and parental pressure to place a child in special education.</p>

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<p>Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, &amp; Maczuga, 2012</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>7,950 children born in 2001 with and without disabilities with complete data on developmental measures at 48 months.</p>	<p>Data are from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). Data gathered through parent interviews, as well as of cognitive, behavioral, and physical assessments.</p>	<p>By 48 months of age, minority children are disproportionately underrepresented in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE). Racial-ethnic minorities were less likely than Whites to be evaluated and diagnosed by professionals as having communication, attention, or learning problems.</p>
<p>Morrier &amp; Gallagher, 2011</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>69,538 children between the ages of 3 and 5 with disabilities within and across the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee.</p>	<p>Westat website (<a href="http://www.ideadata.org">www.ideadata.org</a>)</p>	<p>Placement patters indicate that ethnically diverse preschoolers are disproportionately represented in settings other than full inclusion, with preschoolers classified as Hispanic showing the greatest disproportionate representation. Ethnically diverse preschoolers were not overrepresented in settings with no known inclusion, with the exception of children classified as Hispanic in one state even though this state reported a smaller percentage of the population as being Hispanic.</p>

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<p>Skiba, Michael, &amp; Nardo, 2000</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>11,001 students in 19 middle schools in a large, urban Midwestern public school district.</p>	<p>Disciplinary records of all students for the 1994-1995 school years.</p>	<p>Males and African-American students were overrepresented on all measures of school discipline (referrals, suspensions, expulsions), while females and Caucasian students were under-represented on all measures. Disproportionality among males and African-American students increases with movement from suspension to expulsion. Black students are referred to the office for infractions that are both less serious and more subjective in their interpretation than white students.</p>
<p>Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson &amp; Wu, 2006</p>	<p>Qualitative</p>	<p>64 individuals (7 special education directors, 9 school psychologists, 20 principals and assistant principals, and 28 classroom teachers) from 7 school districts surrounding a large Midwestern city.</p>	<p>Semi-structured interview</p>	<p>Exposure to poverty and poverty-related stressors increases the likelihood of referral to special education for many students of color; however, poverty alone does not explain the various sources of cultural incongruence cited as a factor by some participants in the study. Lack of resources, particularly for managing behavior, is linking to over</p>

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				referral for minority students.
Sullivan & Bal, 2013	Quantitative	18,000 students in 39 schools of an urban K-12 school system.	Student- and school-level archival data from one urban school district in the Midwest United States, obtained through an institutional agreement between the authors and the district.	Males and those receiving free/reduced price lunch were at an elevated risk for special education identification in each disability category examined (LD, EBD, Cognitive Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Speech-Language Impairment, Low-Incidence disability), but racial-minority students demonstrated the greatest risk across all categories.
Sullivan, 2011	Quantitative	All students enrolled in schools in a Southwestern state's public school system between 1999 and 2006 which reported enrollment data for students identified as ELL.	Secondary analysis of annual data on general and special education enrollment from a Southwestern state and each district, including other data concerning district demographics and resource characteristics available from the state department of education for the 1999 to 2006 academic school years.	At the state level, students identified as ELL were increasingly overrepresented in special education and in each of the high-incidence categories of SLD, SLI, and MIMR. A high degree of underrepresentation was persistent for ED.

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Sweller, Graham, & Van Bergen, 2012	Quantitative	K-12 students enrolled in public school in New South Wales, Australia between 1997 and 2009.	School enrollment data published in New South Wales Department of Education and Communities' annual reports and statistical bulletins from 1997 to 2009.	Indigenous students are overrepresented in special schools and support classes at both elementary and secondary levels, whereas language background other than English (LBOTE) students are underrepresented in special schools and support classes at elementary levels but overrepresented in secondary school support classes.
Talbot, Fleming, Karabatsos, & Dobria, 2011	Quantitative	1,394,024 students attending 2,104 elementary, middle, and high schools in Illinois during the 2004-2005 school years.	Data describing race and gender of students with MR, ED, and LD, as well as school enrollment data, was provided by the Office for Civil Rights in the United States Department of Education.	School variables including district size, majority population (Caucasian, African American, or Latino), population of SES and LEP students, student attendance, mobility, and truancy, and demographics of teachers was the most significant predictor of MR, ED, and LD, not gender or race.
Zucker & Prieto, 1977	Quantitative	280 special education teachers attending graduate summer classes at a large state supported university.	Results of fictitious case study assignment tied to a 7-point Linkert scale.	Teachers scored special class placement more appropriate for Mexican-American students than for white students. Teachers scored males and females equally.

*Summary of findings and discussion*

Although the full extent to which teacher bias effects the disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education programs has not been established, research demonstrates that it does exist. In a 1974 study of 494 classrooms in the Southwestern United States, Jackson and Cosca found that teachers praised and encouraged white students 35% more than Mexican-American students, accepted or used the ideas of white students 40% more, and directed 21% more questions to white students (Zucker & Prieto, 1977). In another study, Bahr, Fuchs, Stecker, and Fuchs (1991) found that although there were only minor differences in descriptions of academic and behavioral functioning, general education teachers were more likely to describe African American students as difficult to teach, and thus more likely to refer them to special education (as cited in Skiba, et al., 2008). A third study found that teachers were more likely to refer minority students to special education than their white peers, and that these referrals were more likely to be based upon behavior issues than academic ones (Gottlieb, Gottlieb, & Trongone, 1991).

Further highlighting the issue of teacher bias in over-referring CLD students for special education, other studies show that when the proportion of teachers from racial backgrounds similar to their students increases, disproportionality is reduced. Saft and Pianta (2001) found that when teachers and students shared the same race, teachers rated their relationships with students more positively (as cited in Skiba, et al., 2008). Another study found that as the percentage of African American teachers increased, the overrepresentation of African American students in the EBD category decreased (Skiba, et al., 2008). Ladner and Hammons (2001) found

that the disproportionate rates of referral to special education between African American and Caucasian students rose in direct proportion to the percentage of the teaching force that was White, especially in districts where the student population was 60% or more Caucasian. Thus it becomes apparent that when the majority of the student population comes from the majority, “normal”, culture, teachers are more apt to identify CLD students as having a disability. In educational settings where more students are from minority backgrounds, but make up a larger percentage of the student body, disproportionate representation is less likely to be present, especially when there are more teachers of color, as well.

There are many factors that can influence the presence of teacher bias. Some factors are simple enough to define as prejudice and poor judgment, while other factors stem more from ignorance and lack of cultural awareness. Often, referrals for special education are based on the intersection of the teachers’ perception of student ability and behavior with their personal expectations, as well as their methods of instruction and classroom management (Echevarria, Powers, & Elliott, 2004). When educators are inexperienced, do not have enough training regarding working with CLD populations, or lack appropriate resources in their classrooms and schools, they may be more likely to over-refer minority students to special education.

Unfortunately, students from diverse cultural backgrounds are the same students who are more likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers and attend poorly funded schools. In some instances, teachers who have not yet developed strong classroom and behavior management skills may be more likely to refer problem students to special education instead of examining their own deficits as teachers. This may be especially likely when they do not have enough

classroom support (paraprofessionals, parent volunteers, etc.) to assist them in addressing the needs of all students.

With personal reflection and professional development, all educators have the opportunity to alleviate their impact on the disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education. One of the most significant ways in which educators can work towards avoiding bias and prejudice in the classroom is by doing away with the deficit model and embracing a strengths based perspective. This means recognizing the unique and varied attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of students as assets rather than disabilities. Another method is to practice culturally relevant and responsive teaching methods. This means using learners' cultures, experiences, and learning styles to provide instruction that motivates and empowers learners intellectually, socially, and emotionally (Shealey, et al., 2011).

Further methods to prevent CLD students from being overrepresented in special education include revising traditional assessment practices that rely heavily on the use of potentially biased standardized tests. Performance based and portfolio assessment methods, curriculum-based measurement, rubrics, student journals and learning logs, and self-evaluation techniques are alternative assessment methods that may be useful (Salend, et al., 2002). Additionally, educators must work to use culturally appropriate behavior management strategies. Traditional, and current, behavioral norms in schools require "conformity, passivity, quietness, and individualized competitive participation during teacher-focused activities" (Salend, et al, 2002, pp. 294). Thus, misinterpretation of student behaviors may occur when CLD students do not meet these behavioral expectations, not because they are being defiant or disrespectful, but because they are acting within their home culture's behavioral norms.

Echevarria, et al. (2004) call for improved teacher preparation programs to alleviate teacher bias and reduce disproportionate representation of minority students in special education, asserting that preparing both general and special education teachers to work with CLD students begins at the pre-service level. In addition to learning about diversity, second language acquisition, culturally relevant instructional methods and interventions, pre-service teachers should also participate in field experiences that expose them to diverse populations. These authors further state that extensive teacher training in teaching literacy skills is critical. 80% of students identified as LD experience problems with reading, thus having both general and special educators who can teach reading skills at a mastery level will greatly benefit all students (Echevarria, et al., 2004). Once teachers are practicing, it is important that they take advantage of any staff development opportunities that their districts may offer in topics such as understanding the educational needs of CLD students, designing culturally relevant teaching programs that promote family involvement, and classroom management techniques (Salend, et al., 2002).

In being mindful of some of the strategies and methods previously addressed, all educators will be better prepared to work with a student population that is growing more and more diverse every year. Hopefully, through active participation to develop some of these outlooks and skills, teachers can do their part in reducing the bias that contributes to the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs.