

**Good Intentions, Poor Outcomes: Centering Culture and Language**

**Diversity Within Response to Intervention**

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### **Abstract**

Culturally and linguistically diverse students face longstanding issues of inequity within public schools in the United States. Response to intervention (RTI) is one proposed solution that addresses the inequities. As advocates for all students, school counselors possess the training and knowledge to promote fairness and equity within the RTI process. Using critical race theory, the authors present a vignette and conceptualize methods based on school counselors' education and training that school counselors can use to promote equity within RTI for culturally diverse students.

*Keywords:* response to intervention, school counselors, critical race theory, culturally and linguistically diverse students

## **Good Intentions, Poor Outcomes: Centering Culture and Language Diversity Within Response to Intervention**

The demographics of public schools in the United States have changed immensely since the peak of the Civil Rights Era in 1968. From 1968 to the present, the student demographics shifted from a majority White population to a more heterogeneous mix (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014) where culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students comprised 49.7% of students in public schools (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016). As public schools continue to diversify, outcome data indicate that “who a student is matters more for their educational attainment more so than how a student performs in school” (Kramarczuk Voulgarides, Fergus, & Thorius, 2017, p. 62). Research examining school outcomes for CLD students over the last 50 years has shown that the disparities experienced by CLD students have been nearly intractable and longstanding (Orfield & Frankenburg, 2014). Today’s CLD students experience more segregated, under-resourced schools with more inexperienced teachers (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016), higher risk of exclusionary discipline and referral to special education (Belser, Shillingford, & Joe, 2016), lower graduation and retention rates (Belser et al., 2016, Carter, Skiba, Arrendondo, & Pollack, 2017), as well as reduced access to Advanced Placement program classes and gifted education (Carter et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016). School counselors are uniquely trained in systemic school-level change as well as data-informed advocacy practices which uniquely positions them as change agents (Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015). School counselors can serve as leaders in the process to interrogate biases and systems which

often result in disproportionate placement for CLD students in special education and/or serve as precursors to exclusionary discipline (Better-Bubon, Brunner, & Kansteiner, 2016).

Disproportionate representation refers to a phenomenon where CLD students are over- or under-identified within particular categories when compared to their representation within the total school population or overall population (Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2017; Sciuchetti, 2017). Disproportionate representation also refers to differences in educational outcomes by race/ethnicity (Sullivan & Proctor, 2016). Disproportionate identification and placement of CLD youth into special education or exclusionary discipline epitomizes longstanding issues of equity and exclusion based on race, ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status (Bal, Sullivan, & Harper, 2014). As Orfield and Frankenburg (2014) noted “we do not know how to make segregation equal” (p. 720) as we continue to implement policies to rectify issues that minoritized populations face within the public schools. To address the persistent educational disparities for CLD students (and special education overidentification for all students), laws and policies shifted to require implementation of procedures to ensure appropriate and timely identification of disabilities and/or behavioral challenges (Cartledge, Kea, Watson, & Oif, 2016). The reauthorizations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) in 2004 and 2008, respectively, highlighted continued disproportionality of CLD students, recommended a response to intervention (RTI) program, initially, and then multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) as alternative evaluation strategies to supplement or replace discrepancy/deficit models, and reallocated funds to redress over-identification

(Artiles, Bal, & King Thorius, 2010; Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2017). As a result, state departments of education have implemented aspects of RTI, encouraged its use, and, in some cases, legally mandated the use of RTI (Patrikakou, Ockerman, & Hollenbeck, 2016). RTI is similar to a public health model where educators determine students' response to a 'treatment' and then intensify or alter the 'treatment' if the students are unresponsive (Bineham, Shelby, Pazey, & Yates, 2014). When appropriately implemented, RTI addresses academic, social/emotional, and behavioral issues facilitating improvement in educational outcomes for students (Eagle, Dowd-Eagle, Snyder, & Holtzman, 2015; Patrikakou et al., 2016; Utlely & Obiakor, 2015). Ideally, RTI provides systematic, coordinated, equitable, and data-driven strategies to resolve academic and behavioral challenges for struggling students using both prevention and intervention approaches (Belser et al., 2016; Patrikakou et al., 2016; Sugai & Horner, 2009). Similarly, school counselors use a systemic, data-driven, and advocacy-oriented perspective when addressing students' academic, social/emotional, and behavioral needs (Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin, & Donohue, 2016).

RTI's tiered model of prevention/intervention aligns well with the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) model of comprehensive school counseling programs. As a result, ASCA recommended that school counselors participate in and align comprehensive school counseling programs with RTI (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Both models emphasize collaboration and coordinated services, the collection and use of student and school data, the promotion of both prevention and intervention strategies, and implementation of culturally responsive services and interventions that address disparities (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Despite the push for RTI in schools and school

counselor involvement in RTI, school counseling research and policy has yet to address a glaring issue: the efficacy of RTI to improve outcomes for CLD students. Without intentional emphasis on linguistic and socio-cultural data, RTI yields continued inequitable outcomes for CLD students (Thorius & Maxcy, 2015). Some researchers suggest ways that school counselors could participate in RTI (e.g., Ockerman, Patrikakou, & Hollenbeck, 2015; Patrikakou et al., 2016; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016), but none specifically suggest that school counselors use their training in multiculturalism and advocacy as integral tools within the RTI process. Using critical race theory (CRT) as a framework and the ASCA National Model as a guide, the authors present a case vignette that centralizes linguistic and sociocultural data into RTI processes to increase and promote equitable results for CLD students.

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students**

Overall, the term *CLD* encompasses a heterogeneous group of students who experience educational disparities in different forms. The subgroup of students identified as CLD encompasses students from racial or ethnic minority groups, linguistic minority groups, students living in poverty (Cramer, 2015; Sullivan, 2011), and sexual minority and gender nonconforming students (Poteat, Scheer, & Chong, 2016). The enrollment of CLD students in public schools has increased steadily over the last 50 years (Orfield & Frankenburg, 2014); however, systemic inequities remain firmly entrenched for these students.

### **Discrimination in Schools**

Scholars have identified several ways structural discrimination occurs in daily practices (interventions) in schools. For example, Weinstein, Gregory, and Stambler

(2004) suggested that expectancy theory plays a role in the negative self-fulfilling prophecies of minoritized students as well as the incorrect assumptions and expectations of teachers about students of color. Low expectations and incorrect assumptions show up in both disciplinary and academic practices. CLD students face unwarranted disciplinary policies and interventions based on biased negative perceptions of their students' behaviors and less rigorous curricula and classroom (instructional practices). These are often based on low expectations for CLD students' ability to learn or achieve, or generalized negative perceptions of CLD families that lead to less school engagement, inhospitable school policies, and lack of inclusion in "problem-solving and decision-making processes" (Sullivan, Artiles, & Hernandez-Saca, 2015, p. 132).

As the enrollment of minoritized students increases in public schools, those students are finding themselves increasingly segregated (Orfield & Frankenburg, 2014). This type of segregation involves far more than ethnic/racial demographics. Schools with high concentrations of Black and/or Latinx students are often comprised of students from impoverished backgrounds. As a result, students in these largely segregated schools are isolated from their White peers as well as from peers from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Orfield & Frankenburg, 2014). The experience levels of teachers in these schools pose another potential problem. Public schools with high numbers of CLD students are often comprised of newer and less experienced teachers (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Current demographics for public school educators, generally, do not mirror the rising student diversity within public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

As the proportion of CLD students in public schools has increased, the educator workforce has failed to follow the same trends. During the 2013-2014 academic year, approximately 76% of all public school teachers were female and 82% were White, non-Hispanic (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Although limited research exists on the demographics of school counselors, Bruce and Brideland (2012) reported that approximately 78% of secondary-level school counselors identify as White females. The resulting “within-school boundary” created by cultural differences between school personnel and students likely contributes to the learning challenges faced by CLD students (Carter et al., 2017, p. 214). Many scholars purport that public-school systems in the United States indoctrinate students with a Western, White, middle class orientation (Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009; Skiba et al., 2008) and have a history of using race or difference to disadvantage students of color (Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevarez, 2017). Because of the expectations associated with American public-school culture, school personnel often fail to connect academic lessons taught to the actual experiences of CLD students (Jordan, 2005; Skiba et al., 2008). Additionally, school personnel often create curricula largely absent of the role culture plays in knowledge acquisition and application (Sheets, 2005).

School personnel who lack a critical understanding of their biases and the impacts of culture on learning may construe their pedagogy and interventions as race-neutral or culturally neutral. Supposedly race-neutral or culturally neutral practices reify the normality of Whiteness while leaving biased or racist practices unchallenged and unmitigated in classrooms and schools (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Peters, Margolin, Fragnoli, & Bloom, 2016). With additional course work and training, White school



personnel endeavor to increase efficacy with CLD students. However, researchers report continued “White resistance to and fatigue from talking about and working with race” (Sleeter, 2016, p. 2). Moreover, the additional multicultural or social justice training does not necessarily lead educators to look systemically at the problems encountered by CLD students (Sleeter, 2016) or the “subjective and racialized nature” of the processes preceding special education referral, identification, and placement (Annamma, 2015, p. 294). Even when educators have undergone multicultural training, they tend to attribute students’ academic and behavioral challenges to inherent deficits of the students or their communities rather than systemic or institutional failures (Sleeter, 2016; Thorius et al., 2014). Educators must have training to prepare culturally responsive pedagogy and interventions for diverse students present in their classrooms and schools (Green & Edwards-Underwood, 2015; Sleeter, 2016) and to dismantle deficit discourses that continue to influence implementation and outcomes (Thorius et al., 2014). The paucity of culturally responsive educational spaces contributes to disparate educational outcomes for CLD students.

### **Structural and Personal Discrimination**

Adair (2015) thoroughly described the personal and structural forms of discrimination experienced in U.S. schools. Personal forms of discrimination included negative interactions at school, narrow learning experiences, low intellectual expectations, and devaluation of home languages (Adair, 2015). Structural forms of school-based discrimination included segregation, few high-quality resources, insufficient bilingual programs, and poor teacher/school engagement with parents (Adair, 2015; Sullivan, 2011). African American and Native American students continue

to be overidentified for the high-incidence disability categories (e.g., cognitive impairment, emotional behavioral disorders, and specific learning disabilities) relative to White students (Cartledge et al., 2016; Sullivan & Artiles, 2011). Latinx students and English language learners (ELs) show patterns of both over- and under-representation in high-incidence disability identification in state- and district-level analyses likely due to their complex educational needs, inappropriate assessment practices, and challenges associated with differentiating language acquisition from learning difficulties (Sullivan, 2011). An examination of disciplinary data for CLD students (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014) revealed that African American and Latinx students receive suspensions and expulsions at higher rates than White students (four times and 2.5 times higher suspension rates, respectively, and 2.5 times higher expulsion rate). Like racial and ethnic minority students, sexual minority students receive exclusionary discipline at higher rates than heterosexual youth (Poteat, Scheer, & Chong, 2016).

The disparate educational outcomes for CLD students likely signal a lack of appropriate interventions and/or implementation of potentially harmful interventions. Overidentification of students in specialized learning or behavioral programs signifies the provision of unnecessary or potentially harmful services. Conversely, under-identification signifies a lack of potentially beneficial services for students (Ford, 2012; Gage, Gersten, Sugai, & Newman-Gonchar, 2013; Sullivan, 2011). Either over- or under-identification reproduces sociohistorical inequities for CLD youth (Bal et al., 2014). Both outcomes are inequitable and prevent students from accessing needed supports or rigor to reach their academic potential. Prior to the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, educators diagnosed many of the learning and behavioral difficulties

experienced by CLD students based on a discrepancy or deficit model which focused on perceived weaknesses and deficiencies of the students themselves (D'Amato, Crepeau-Hobson, Huang, & Geil, 2005; García & Ortiz, 2008; Sailor, 2009). RTI was touted as one method to move away from the deficit model, but, in many ways, the deficit model remains an implicit feature of RTI because RTI models, in practice, have an underlying assumption that student failure has a basis in internal deficits rather than systemic challenges or classroom instructional practices (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Klingner et al., 2005; Kozleski & Huber, 2010).

### **Response to Intervention**

Researchers, educators, and lawmakers have noted the potential of RTI models to provide equity-minded, systemic reforms for persistent educational challenges, such as delayed responses to students' academic failure, disproportionality of CLD students in special education, or the mis-identification of learning disabilities (Artiles, 2011; Thorius & Maxcy, 2015). The underlying concepts of RTI are not new, but the widespread adoption of RTI models accelerated after the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 (Cramer, 2015; Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2012). The reauthorized IDEA allowed states to abandon discrepancy-based identification processes for learning disabilities and special education (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006; Ockerman et al., 2012). RTI models offer the possibility of early identification of and interventions for struggling learners through a multi-tiered framework and continuous progress monitoring (Artiles et al., 2010; Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Burns, Jacob, & Wagner, 2008; Ockerman et al., 2012). In addition, the RTI framework design offers support to students *before they experience*

*significant failure* (Montalvo, Combes, & Kea, 2014, p. 204). Theoretically, the changes unified under RTI models strengthen data collection and analysis while emphasizing equitable outcomes for all students (Thorius & Maxcy, 2015).

RTI implementation may vary in individual schools or districts, but most models involve a three- or four-tiered framework (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Harris-Murri et al., 2006; Montalvo et al., 2014; Ockerman et al., 2012). The more popular model of RTI uses the three-tiered framework (Klingner et al., 2005; Ockerman, et al., 2012). Broadly, Tier One consists of high quality, research-based instruction with concurrent progress monitoring in the general education milieu. Tier Two involves the provision of intensive instruction and support for students who fail to make adequate progress on the assessments and benchmarks administered in Tier One. This support may consist of small group instruction or tutorial support provided in the general education setting. Finally, if students fail to respond to the intensive support provided in Tier Two, they move to Tier Three where they receive an intervention with increased frequency, a referral for special education evaluation, or placement into special education (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Klinger et al., 2005; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Montalvo et al., 2014; Ockerman et al., 2012; Sanford, Esparza Brown, & Turner, 2012; Xu & Drame, 2008). While general education and specialized instruction teachers as well as administrators have specific, specialized roles in the RTI process, school counselor roles are often diverse within each tier of the RTI continuum.

### **School Counselors and Response to Intervention**

The school counseling profession is transforming to incorporate systemic practices to meet the academic, social/emotional, and career needs for all students.

Transformed school counseling supports educational equity and promotes equitable access to high-quality educational practices (Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015; Erford, 2015).

Hines et al. noted:

Transformed school counselors acknowledge the broad, systemic societal inequities that are present within and outside of school and assume responsibility in taking action to eliminate said inequities. This means that school counselors for social justice focus on historically underserved and marginalized groups (2017, p. 9).

When school counselors focus on the needs of marginalized students within their comprehensive school counseling programs, their leadership helps create a context where their efforts can truly help all students (Steen & Noguera, 2010). School counselors serve as essential leaders within the RTI process (Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Gleason-Carroll, 2011). In addition, they contribute to the RTI process using advocacy, leadership, collaboration, consultation, and data-based decision-making skills (Chen-Hayes, Ockerman & Mason, 2014). In response to school counselors' potentially unique contributions, ASCA (2014) delineated potential school counselor roles and activities within a multi-tiered system of support in a position statement and recommended that school counselors participate in RTI implementation and align their comprehensive school counseling programs with prevention and intervention work to improve students' academic, social/emotional, and behavioral outcomes (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Although the ASCA National Model (2012) does not explicitly address marginalized youth, multicultural competence, or social justice (Baskin & Slaten; 2013; Nelson, Bustamante, Wilson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2008), it clearly delineates the functions of school counselors in comprehensive school counseling programs.

## **ASCA National Model and School Counselor Roles in RTI**

School counselors are both supporters and interveners at all tiers of RTI (Ockerman et al., 2012). As supporters, school counselors attend meetings and recommend and share their academic and social-emotional knowledge or expertise. ASCA (2012) identifies advocating for students at individualized education or special student meetings as an appropriate role for school counselors. At Tier One, school counselors may provide support by attending team- or grade- level meetings (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ockerman et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). School counselors may share information about students, school culture, or community resources to meet the needs of all students (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). At Tiers Two and Three, school counselors may attend RTI meetings and make recommendations regarding academic and behavioral interventions. Additionally, school counselors aid in decisions about the amount of intervention provided to students and help determine students' transitions through the tiers (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016).

School counselors who adhere to the ASCA National Model (2012) are also advocates and interveners in the RTI process. As interveners, school counselors meet student needs through varied actions including counseling, coordinating, consulting, developing, analyzing, and reviewing data (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ockerman et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). At Tier One, school counselors may collaborate and consult with teachers about curriculum or classroom management (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016) while collecting academic, behavioral, attendance, discipline, and anecdotal data from teachers and other stakeholders to identify students' specific needs. School counselors also intervene at Tier One by delivering preventative,

core curriculum lessons and activities that promote academic and behavioral success for all students (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016).

School counselor action at Tier One may lead to more specialized intervention at Tiers Two and Tier Three. Following the ASCA National Model (2012), an appropriate role for school counselors is to deliver small group counseling to students with specific academic or behavioral needs (Ockerman et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Additionally, school counselors may coordinate student-based services identified through RTI such as tutoring or mentoring (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Using data analysis, school counselors may assess the impact of these interventions on RTI related outcomes (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ockerman et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Despite the aspirations of school counseling programs and collaborations within the RTI process, inequitable outcomes still exist. School counselors must attend to multicultural and social justice concerns associated with RTI (Hernández Finch, 2012) and systemic interventions related to disproportionality (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012) to facilitate and continue the transformation of the profession.

### **The Catch-22 of RTI**

The persistent academic achievement gaps between CLD students and their White peers and longstanding issue of disproportionality in special education imply that race-neutral or culturally neutral school reforms are not effective (García & Ortiz, 2008). Policy makers and educators touted RTI as a method to combat injustice and inequity in special education referrals and identification for CLD students (Thorius et al., 2014); however, research studies have not confirmed those assumptions (Bouman, 2010; Hartlep & Ellis, 2012; NCCRESt). Researchers reported that educators who operate

within an RTI model often come to believe that RTI removes bias from the process of identifying, assessing, and referring struggling learners for special education (Bouman, 2010; Hernández Finch, 2012; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Because educators believe the RTI process itself eliminates bias, they may continue to use a deficits-based approach within RTI that labels cultural difference as a disadvantage (Orosco & Klingner 2010). RTI policies may not be intrinsically discriminatory, but school counselors must continue to examine outcomes of RTI implementation to determine impacts on educational equity (Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2017).

### **Critical Race Theory in Education and Response to Intervention**

Critical race theory (CRT) in education is an emerging framework to critique race and racist systems within education (Yosso, Villalpando, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001). CRT offers tools to interrogate the current system of identification and referral for RTI and, by extension, special education (Zion & Blanchett, 2011). CRT provides an apt framework to analyze structural biases and appearances of fairness and neutrality. A core premise of CRT is that “racism is endemic, institutional, and systemic” (Sleeter, 2016, p. 3). When applied to RTI, CRT premises assert that the continued inequities produced by the processes of RTI are not happenstance.

CRT empowers counselors to analyze racialized disparate outcomes by centering those disparate outcomes within the discussion of racism (Howard, 2010). CRT in education includes: (a) a centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) a challenge to dominant ideology, (c) a commitment to social justice, (d) a centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) a transdisciplinary perspective (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Yosso et al., 2001). Scholars



have applied portions of CRT in school settings to undergird their research and have found that school stakeholders who were successful in closing racial achievement gaps, examined race, racism, and their impacts on learning (Howard, 2010).

CRT provides school counselors yet another conceptual framework to expose and critically examine issues of inequity in schools. The following sections will describe how school counselors can incorporate tenets of CRT into RTI to reduce and develop solutions for inequitable outcomes for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students.

### **Critical Race Theory Application**

When applying a CRT framework, school counselors should consider the following areas: (a) biases, (b) cultural responsiveness, (c) counternarratives, (d) benefits, and (e) labels (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Questions may be generated in each area when implementing RTI based activities at every tier. Questions should align with the foundational concepts of the ASCA National Model (2012). Examples of questions include (a) What are my biases? What are the biases of others? (b) Is this practice culturally responsive? What resources are needed for the school stakeholders? (c) What narratives other than internal deficits are true about the student? How can I identify those narratives? (d) Who benefits from the current RTI activities? Who does not benefit from these activities? and (e) What labels are used regarding student(s)? Whose labels are considered valid? What are the repercussions of this labeling? The following section describes how a school counselor might infuse critical race questions at each level of the RTI process.

## Case Vignette

*Diane is a school counselor at an elementary school. The school's racial demographics consist of 20% Latinx, 30% Black and 50% White students. After reviewing RTI records, Diane noticed that 80% of students referred to the RTI process were Black or Latinx. Diane participates as both a supporter and intervener in the RTI process. Diane attends weekly RTI meetings and bi-weekly grade level meetings to hear about student concerns. During meetings, she shares appropriate information about students and provides information regarding the academic and social-emotional needs of students and their families. Additionally, Diane shares classroom management ideas with teachers based on Adlerian principles. At RTI meetings, she listens to reports about academic and behavioral interventions and helps the team determine if these have been effective for students.*

*Diane also intervenes in the RTI process. Diane collects and analyzes school discipline and report card data for all students to identify student needs and inform her school counseling programming. Her counseling curriculum lessons include units on study skills and self-regulation. She also conducts a math anxiety group for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students who are experiencing difficulty in math and have been referred to RTI. Finally, Diane coordinates a morning tutoring program for students with challenges in math and reading. During RTI meetings, Diane shares counseling-related outcome data from these interventions. Diane is concerned about the difference in representation of students referred to the RTI process and is inspired to use a CRT framework to identify concerns and potential solutions.*

**Tier One.** At Tier One, Diane first considers potential biases she may have within the RTI process. *Diane asks, “what biases do I have regarding my students, parents and colleagues?”* She also questions the cultural responsiveness of her Tier One study skills and self-regulation lessons as she evaluates both her delivery method and its effectiveness with Black and Latinx students. Diane then examines the cultural responsiveness of her delivery by asking herself the following: (a) What culturally appropriate strategies do I use (or not use) in the classroom so that students can participate? (b) How is my ASCA Model program addressing the needs of these students specifically? (c) Who specifically benefits from my approach? (d) Who does not benefit and can I pinpoint the reasons? (e) What culturally appropriate strategies do I use (or not use) so that students understand the content? (f) What students have been able to fully participate in my lessons? Diane then assesses counternarratives by asking the following: (a) What are the stories to describe the students’ challenges? (b) Are there other stories that describe the challenges that have not been considered or valued? Using these questions, Diane can create a plan to change or adjust her efforts to better meet student needs.

Following appropriate school counselor roles as outlined by the ASCA National Model (2012), Diane also revisits school discipline and report card data collected at Tier One. She uses this data to examine and unearth inequitable patterns among Black and Latinx students (Carter et al., 2017). Diane disaggregates her school’s data by student group, class, time periods, etc. She notes students’ grades and discipline referrals (type and frequency). Diane uses these data to target teachers for consultation or training

(Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016) as well as to target inequitable school policies so she can advocate for change.

As a supporter, when attending grade level meetings, Diane intently listens for labels being used regarding student, parents, or the community. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Diane offers appropriate counternarratives to discourse about internal student or community deficits by sharing social-emotional insights and narratives into the dialogue such as the impacts of acculturation, anxiety, family separation or trauma, or strengths housed in the students' families or communities. Additionally, Diane poses critical questions to teachers such as: (a) What culturally appropriate strategies are being used in the classroom? (b) What culturally appropriate strategies are not being used in the classroom? (c) What helps/ prevents culturally appropriate strategies from being used? and (d) Who benefits from the current classroom practices? (e) How have we amplified the voices (experiences) of students and parents in our discussion and used their experiences to tailor our assumptions and interventions?

As an intervener, Diane consults with teachers whose students are over-represented in areas such as discipline referrals (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Additionally, Diane consider the cultural responsiveness of her teacher consultation. Diane frequently asks herself: (a) With whom do I consult? (b) Who is utilizing the feedback? (c) Do the suggestions I provide work in diverse classrooms? Diane uses this data to provide and advocate for culturally relevant classroom management trainings or workshops aligning these with her comprehensive school counseling program.

**Tiers Two and Three.** As a group, RTI team members should engage in critical conversations about the RTI process to examine unequal patterns of referral and foster critical discussion regarding data collection, referral, and intervention (Carter et al., 2017; Yosso et al., 2001). The team should consider the context of referrals made to RTI. Diane and other team members should pose questions such as: (a) Why was this student referred to Tier Two or Tier Three? (b) Who benefits from this referral? (c) Describe the relationship with the student and the referee. (d) How does the student describe his/her experiences with educators in school? As a supporter, Diane listens for biases and labels in the discussion. Additionally, she poses questions that expand the narrative beyond students' internal deficits including: (a) What culturally appropriate strategies did the teacher elect to use in the classroom? (b) How were interventions selected for this student? (c) Have the interventions been measured with culturally and linguistically diverse students? (Carter et al., 2017; Yosso et al., 2001)? In addition, Diane incorporates information regarding acculturation, anxiety, family separation, trauma, other social/emotional concerns, and student strengths into the discussion while explaining their potential and real impact on the learning process.

As an intervener, Diane critically examines the interventions or support programs she implements for students such as tutoring or the math anxiety group. She asks herself the following questions: (a) Who has been able to access those resources and who has not? (b) Who does/does not benefit from the way these services are offered? (c) Who is or is not included in these activities? Additionally, Diane considers the cultural responsiveness of the support programs ensuring that these align with the ASCA National Model (2012) based comprehensive school counseling program. She

poses questions such as: (a) How were these programs selected and who benefits from the selection process? (b) Have the programs been measured with Black or Latinx students? (c) What instruments/data are collected to measure student success? (d) Are the instruments/data culturally relevant? (e) Have we considered the counternarratives from students, parents, or the community? Answers to these questions can lead to adjustments or changes to implementation. Additionally, data collected from each Tier is shared with stakeholders to advocate for additional support, training, and resources.

### **Implications for Practice and Future Research**

CRT implores school counselors and other educators to address issues of racism and inequity in schools (Howard & Navarro; 2016; Yosso et al., 2001). These efforts are likely to assist in the reduction of inequitable outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Despite calls for school counselors to improve their multicultural counseling competencies and act as change agents, school counselors have received few methods to influence culturally competent change (Nelson et al., 2008). CRT provides a framework for school counselors to address issues of discrimination within the RTI process. Using a CRT framework in combination with the ASCA National Model (2012) school counselors can willingly examine their own biases, bracket these, and then review data to intentionally identify disparate outcomes for CLD students. School counselors need to humanize this data with dialogue and conversation with CLD students and their families to better understand their unique learning experiences. Furthermore, school counselors need to implement courageous conversations (Carter et al., 2017) and broach racial disparities with other educators to share findings and collaborate to develop solutions.

The ASCA National Model (2012) encourages school counselors to think and act in ways that promote and facilitate systemic change, to shift their understanding of discrimination from an individual to a systemic analysis (Kohli et al., 2017), and to discern the seriousness of disproportionality (Bryan et al., 2012). With this shift, school counselors may be able to help create anti-discriminatory practices by offering professional development support to other educators (Kohli et al., 2017), incorporating students' cultural and linguistic experiences into classroom guidance lessons (Hines et al., 2017), and promoting teachers' use of strengths-based approaches with CLD students (Hines et al., 2017). Addressing issues of racism and discrimination can be difficult and may even produce discomfort among school colleagues. These steps should be taken both strategically and with care and highlight the need for continued professional development and relevant counselor training. Overall, students are the beneficiaries of critical approaches in education. These efforts amplify their voices and provide educators with tools to create more equitable schools and learning environments which should improve student outcomes. Currently, there are few studies in the school counseling literature that utilize CRT in schools. Research studies that examine and build on the use of CRT with the RTI process may be beneficial. Furthermore, studies that measure the impact of CRT (within the RTI process) on educational outcomes are likely to assist in determining if implementing practices based on the theory can mitigate disparate educational outcomes for CLD students.

### **Conclusion**

The road to inequity for CLD students is paved with unexamined "well-meaning" intentions. School counselors who directly confront discrimination within RTI will

contend with assumptions of fairness and cultural neutrality embedded in the processes. Such processes, while ostensibly created to help CLD students, have proven ineffective in addressing long standing inequities. School counselors are encouraged to develop comprehensive school counseling programs that align with the ASCA National Model (2012) wherein they: (a) establish themselves as advocates for change by questioning current practices; (b) implement strategies that are responsive to the unique needs of CLD students; (c) collect school-wide data providing evidence that change is needed; (d) confront biases, assumptions, and inherent systemic barriers. CRT provides a tool to move past unexamined intentions to effective change and interventions that specifically address disparities based on race, ethnicity, language, culture, and/or sexual identities. Using the tenets of CRT and RTI in education, school counselors have additional conceptual resources to challenge notions of fairness, cultural neutrality, and discrimination, while amplifying students' and families' voices throughout the RTI process. Implementing the tenets of CRT and the ASCA National Model (2012) simultaneously with RTI facilitate movement from good intentions to actual positive school outcomes for all students.



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