Special Education: Inclusive Pedagogy & Online Learning UDL Strategies for Inequities Beyond Emergency Remote Learning: A Family Focus

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Abstract

With movement toward a more virtual world, changes in society, and other variables, education has begun to take on a different look through the incorporation of technologies. While students are still being taught along the way, it has been a difficult process to keep families informed of what is being used in the classrooms. In cases where Emergency Remote Teaching has been needed, such as COVID 19, some populations find themselves at a significant disadvantage. While it has been reported parent involvement has been linked to academic achievements and behavioral and social outcomes of students (Epstein, 1987; Wilder, 2014), little is known about parent involvement and collaboration in a virtual environment. Still less is known regarding the involvement of families with cultural and linguistic plurality (CLP) and those with students with disabilities. Disparities have been noted in other areas of research: socioeconomic status, inexperience with technology, educational experience, cultural norms, and social norms. Although there was no previous application of universal design for learning (UDL) to families, UDL can be applied to both in-person and virtual environments to more equitably support families with CLP and who have students with disabilities as they navigate collaboration between school and home through the use of technology.

Keywords: *Universal Design For Learning (UDL); Emergency Remote Learning (ERT); English Language Learners (ELL); Students with Disabilities, Families; Cultural & Linguistic Plurality (CLP); Inequities*

Introduction

Multiple studies over the past four decades have confirmed there is a strong correlation between family involvement, academic achievements, behavioral, and social outcomes of students (Epstein, 1987; Wilder, 2014). Families and teachers, however, often have different views on how to define family involvement (Myers, 2015). Teachers may view involvement as including school based activities such as parent teacher conferences, event planning meetings, field trips and school parties, whereas families may view their role as limited to the home environment with activities like monitoring progress, checking homework, setting expectations, discussing the school day, and tending to extracurricular activities (Newman, 2019).

The difference in perspectives related to the definition of family involvement from the parents' and teachers' views causes difficulties that are further entangled by unequal distribution.

There is research indicating that all family involvement is not equally distributed amongst class, gender, and immigrant status (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). Aiming to quickly digitize the broader educational community, the implementation of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) highlighted these inequities due to the sudden and unplanned shift from in-person teaching to a remote educational setting in a crisis (Hodges et al., 2020). It is worth noting that ERT differs from traditional online learning environments in organization, strategies, execution, and result (Hodges et al., 2020). Furthermore, Carabajal et al. (2003) and Tu and Corry (2002) defined online learning programming as comprised of an organized and research-based technical platform, learning tasks, and social interaction among the students (as cited in Wang, 2005). While online learning programs may be viewed as more intentional and structured, inequities can be found in both learning environments. Covid-19 set the precedent to establish and utilize ERT in additional situations, such as snow day, natural disasters, or other health concerns. From the experiences of Covid-19 professionals have learned that ERT practices can be used and applied to whole schools, classrooms, and families.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2020), many students with disabilities received limited, if any, necessary special education (SPED) services during ERT, due in part to the family's inability to support teachers with the specialized needs of the student (2020). In this article students with a disability are defined as students who are covered under the categories of *Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act* (IDEIA, 2004) and those who might be unidentified. Due to the various terms used in research, such as immigrant, migrant, multilingual, culturally and linguistically diverse, English language proficient, including, Indigenous languages and American Sign Language, this article addresses these terms collectively as families with Cultural and/or Linguistic Plurality (CLP) as to encompass language, culture, and origin while recognizing the sensitivity surrounding the above labels. Also noting that many students of families with CLP, were born in the US. GAO reported that families with CLP had difficulty fully participating in ERT due to various external factors, including language barriers and lack of access to technology (2020).

While many families with CLP might already be at a disadvantage when communicating with the school due to language barriers, families with CLP who also have students with disabilities face additional challenges providing accessibility to content and instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Along with many other families, these families might not have (a) access to and/or experience with online tools and materials; (b) cultural, social, and linguistic support; and/or (c) training and understanding of how to assist their student with disabilities in an academic setting, making the transition from the traditional classroom to ERT, hybrid, or online learning nearly impossible (GAO, 2020). Therefore, families of students with both CLP and disabilities have compounding factors negatively impacting their families' ability to actively participate in school. This reduces the student's opportunity to grow academically, socially, and emotionally, thereby expanding the gap between them and their peers (Wilder, 2014). Awareness of this disparity, increased intervention, and the implementation of universal design for learning (UDL) can bridge the ever-growing gap for both the students and their families. In addition to benefiting families of students with CLP and disabilities, UDL applied to all families can bridge the gap that other families encounter due to similar situations by providing equitable access to education for all students.

The U.S. Department of Education indicated the current research demonstrated social, emotional, and academic impact on both students with disabilities and students with CLP in a variety of ways (Burr et al., 2015), but there is less clarity in regard to families with students facing

both disability and CLP, especially in an online setting. Therefore, intersectional effects are inferred throughout this article with the premise that if one group or both groups are affected in a certain way that the combined subgroup would be affected similarly. In addition to limited research, that which is available is most frequently based on survey data.

However, accessing the views of families using survey methods continues to be a particular challenge. In one study, researchers indicated that their results were limited by the fact that of 1,134 caregivers whose surveys were sent, only 397 (35%) responded, and of these, 301 (76%) were Caucasian (Dinnebeil et al., 1996). Arsal (2019) stated that despite efforts to diversify, the sample surveys were sent through organizations serving traditionally underserved communities, and still the survey did not represent a diverse population and the majority was Caucasian. Therefore, due to availability of generalized and underrepresented research, this article aspires to (a) summarize and (b) organize the literature surrounding families with CLP and families with students with disabilities and provide support for educators to utilize the information, based on the principles of UDL, while more research is conducted on this particular topic.

This article will focus on how ERT spotlighted existing, and in some cases exasperated, educational vulnerabilities experienced by families with CLP who also have students with disabilities. The intent of this article is to identify, highlight, and address the most commonly held educational vulnerabilities within these specific populations during in-person instruction and ERT, although not applicable to all, with the purpose of providing a UDL approach toward meeting those needs and simultaneously addressing the needs of most, if not all, of the students and their families. These vulnerabilities include: (a) social economic impact on school and resource connections; (b) inexperience with and access to technology; (c) the lack of experience with formal education or understanding of the U.S. education system; (d) contrasting culture norms surrounding disabilities; and (e) social isolation due to societal, cultural, and linguistic differences reducing family involvement and attachment to school and home life, leading to the student's decreased academic performance.

The article will also provide two different theoretical family experiences as examples to help illustrate how all families, in particular families with CLP and who have students with disabilities, can benefit from the use of UDL (engagement, representation, action, & expression) when incorporating technology.

Surfacing Inequities

According to the U.S. Department of Education, during the 2017-18 school year, nearly 12% U.S. public schools students received services under IDEIA (2004). Of those students, 11% were students with CLP (2020). The IDEIA of 2004 mandates that parents and families be included in the team effort to construct and implement the student's individualized education program (IEP) (About IDEA, 2020). According to the Civil Rights Division and Office for Civil Rights (n.d.), it is within the school's legal responsibility to provide accessible materials with important school information to families in a language that they can understand. It is important to recognize that a family member's English proficiency can differ from that of the student and the requested language should be provided.

Although some schools provide school announcements in various requested languages, other class materials and meeting options are often in English only and therefore not accessible to families with CLP. A shift to ERT increased the likelihood that materials, classroom platforms,

remote learning presentations, SPED services, and virtual meetings (including IEP) were inaccessible to students with disabilities and their families with CLP (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020). This resulted in lower levels of academic participation among students with CLP during ERT (Los Angeles Times, 2020).

Areas with notable inequalities include, but are not limited to: social economic impact, technology, education experience, cultural norms, and social isolation. Each of these inequalities are discussed below from the perspective of how they impact the student and family, as well as their interactions with the school.

Social Economic Impact

Families with a higher income tend to be more involved compared to those of lower socioeconomic status (SES) (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Turney & Kao, 2009). SES has shown to be positively associated with parent participation in schools (Turney & Kao, 2009). Families with CLP represent a wide variety of SES; therefore, the assumption is not that all families with CLP fall into a lower SES, but that the SES of any race, language, or culture can limit resources. This includes access to technology and the internet, which tends to decrease communication between home and school.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operations and Development (2020), some families with CLP tend to have fewer resources than their native English-speaking peers. During ERT, the Pew Research Center reported that 25% of U.S. adults reported that someone in their family had lost their job (Parker et al., 2020). In addition, applicable families with CLP had avoided non-cash government benefits for fear of conflict with immigrant status or negative experiences with government assistance, causing greater financial strain on these families (Bernstein et al., 2020). With fewer resources and a heightened focus on needs of self-preservation, these specific families are limited in helping students with in-class assignments, homework, and participating in online school events, such as IEP meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and parent teacher organization (PTO) meetings.

Technology

Due to these economic factors, some families with CLP are less likely to have access to a computer or an internet connection at home than their peers, which increases the probability that families lack daily online interaction and experience with technology (OECD, 2020). This puts these families at a significant disadvantage when adapting to online learning, especially ERT. As the digital world continues to grow, assumptions are also made as to phone and smartphone access and daily use. Nevertheless, 16% of men, 21% of women, and 29% of people in rural communities do not own or use a smartphone (Pew Research Center: Internet & Technology, 2019). Therefore, a portion of the population lacks familiarity with the devices most frequently used by schools to connect to the community. When moving unexpectedly to ERT, many of these families had to also adjust to the sudden switch to the unfamiliarity with technology, which was provided on mostly English-only platforms.

Education Experience

English-only online platforms tend to reflect a traditional U.S. educational system. For families with CLP, absence of experience with formal education or understanding of the U.S. educational system can impede academic advancements of students with disabilities. Although there has been an increase of college-educated families with CLP in the U.S. in the past five years, according to the U.S. Census (2017), around 68% of families with CLP in the U.S. have no formal college degree. Of that 68%, around 16% have less than a 9th grade education, which can create a challenge for families to support students who are working on material past that or any other completed grade level (U.S. Census, 2017). Families with CLP faced more misunderstanding between home and school around their role in the collaborative relationships teachers are wanting (Turney & Kao, 2009). It is important to note that many families with CLP come from distinct cultures and educational backgrounds and offer different perspectives and sets of expectations that often do not correspond or align to the climate and culture of the U.S. school system (Newman, 2019).

Barriers also arise when families with CLP attempt to support students with homework and instructions that are only provided in English. Since many of these families face difficulty understanding both the U.S. educational system and the language, their students fall behind their peers in academic achievement (OECD, 2015). For students with a disability and with CLP, challenges tend to intensify over the course of their school career, leading to increased dropouts. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the graduation rate for students with disabilities was 66% and 67% for students with CLP, compared with 84% of all students. Although intentional online learning and organized curriculum has been reported to support the specific needs of students with CLP and disabilities (Shonefeld & Ronen, 2015), ERT reflected major gaps in fully meeting those needs (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020).

Cultural Norms

Perceptions or understanding of families with CLP or with disabilities is directly linked to cultural norms. According to the World Report on Disabilities provided by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011), some developing countries do not provide services or lack availability of resources to support students with special needs. Therefore, some students with CLP may have not previously received support for their disability, if originating in one of those countries. Or due to frequent relocation some families might be unaware of or access to supports that their child needs (Rivera-Singletary & Cranston-Gingras, 2020). Additionally, perceived stigma is often attached to individuals with disabilities and, consequently, families may attempt to mask or ignore the need for assistive services (Hatmaker et al., 2010). These perceptions of disabilities play a role in families and community's attitudes towards and interactions with the individual with a disability. For further example, some cultures have been documented as viewing severe disabilities as a result of past sins, a family being cursed by an enemy, or as taking away legitimacy (Groce & Zola, 1993). When a disability has these types of negative connotations placed on it from the culture, the family may be less willing to provide resources to those in need (Groce & Zola, 1993). It is important to note, that not all cultures have a negative outlook on disabilities. Some Native American tribes, such as the Navajo, view a person with a disability as a teacher for the tribe, bringing a special lesson and offering a unique gift (Medina et al., 1998).

Family beliefs about the causes of their child's disability play a role in the professional support or services they seek for their child. It can also have an impact on their interactions with the IEP team and during IEP meetings, as well as their expectations. Families from collectivist cultures rely extensively on their extended family and friend networks for support. These largely influence the family's understanding and acceptance of the student's disability (Ravindran & Myers, 2012).

Daley (2002) advised against generalizing the treatment approaches used in the U.S. to individuals with disabilities across the world, since each culture approaches and views disabilities differently. Disability is prevalent in all cultures around the world, but the meaning and implication of the disability varies greatly (Ravindran & Myers, 2012). It is important to talk to families about disabilities and understanding cultural norms, as well as help with awareness.

Students with CLP and with disabilities face not only linguistic differences but also conflicts between home and school culture. These students often have to choose to reject home culture and language to "fit in" at school, which can lead to a deep emotional separation from part of their identity (Tong et al. 2006). During ERT, many students had to expose their home life to peers through virtual calls, building up additional anxiety about fitting in. Research is still being done on the impact of ERT, but some initial, informal surveys have revealed anxiety and discomfort around "cameras on" and active participation in virtual learning, especially families with living situations outside what was perceived as normal (Mehta & Aguilera, 2020), which led to inflated separation from peers and teachers.

Social Isolation

Prior to ERT, many students with CLP and their families faced linguistic isolation, which is linked to social isolation and lower academic achievement (Drake, 2014). Additionally, students with disabilities have also reported less social connection, leading to increased loneliness and social isolation when compared to peers (Emerson, 2021). In addition to existing social isolation for students with both CLP and disabilities, according to Challenge Success (2021) students reported that both social relationships with teachers and peers decreased during ERT.

For many of these students and their families, social and linguistic isolation is further compounded by microaggressions, which are intentional or unintentional verbal, behavioral, or environmental interactions that communicate negative or hostile attitudes toward marginalized groups (Williams, 2020). Microagressionscan create a perceived lower status for non-dominant language(s) used by students or their families, resulting in discrimination and unwelcome circumstances inside and outside of the classroom (López et al., 2014; Sue et al., 2007). Schools can unintentionally create hidden messages that speaking, hearing, and understanding the English language is essential for family participation, which can create a dual barrier for families with CLP and a disability (López et al., 2014; Parsons & Shim, 2019). Social and linguistic isolation based on CLP and disabilities is linked to lower motivation in school and decreased academic performance (Bek, 2017; Emerson, 2021).

First Scenario
Setiawan Family Experience: A Cultural Divide

This first scenario provides a typical perspective of what families may have experienced when they enter a school or classroom pre-ERT. It was developed as a theoretical example linking the inequalities and disparities that are found in the research.

The Setiawan family moved to the U.S. when their three children were in elementary school. The family was surrounded by others from Indonesia, including several extended family members. Their children joined cousins and friends at the neighborhood school. The neighborhood school had a culturally and linguistically diverse student population; however, like the majority of elementary schools across the United States, many of the teachers were from white, middle-class backgrounds (Castro, 2010). This dynamic can result in cultural misunderstandings where teachers hold deficit views and lower expectations for students and their families (Castro, 2010).

When the family arrived pre-ERT, the parents and the children only spoke Indonesian, a standardized form of Malay and the national language of Indonesia. Indonesia is a collectivistic culture, meaning they focus on the goals for the members of the whole group and long-term relationships, rather than individual rights. Family members would support each other and siblings would help to raise younger siblings.

When the Setiawan parents needed help enrolling their three children in school, one of Mrs. Setiawan's sisters joined them to translate the documents and any information from the school staff. It was not long after the children had started school, the school began sending notes home about their daughter Kemala. Though the school had a large Indonesian student population within a very diverse overall student population, the notes came home written in English only. The notes were difficult for the Setiawan family to read. They would wait for Mrs. Setiawan's sister to get home from work to read the notes and explain them to the parents. The notes often contained untranslatable idioms.

Prior to ERT, the notes contained information regarding assessments for a possible learning disability. There were requests for a meeting, which the parents reluctantly attended with fear of judgement from their community about a child with a disability. After the initial meeting, evaluation, and an IEP meeting, Kemala began receiving SPED services in the resource room for her learning disability. The SPED teacher sent Kemala home with a paper that described all of the procedures for the classroom and how she would be communicating information with the family.

On the paper, the SPED teacher indicated that she would send updates to the classroom parents using an app that the parents could all download on their iPad® or smartphone. The family had recently purchased a phone in order to call and text family members; however, it did not have any additional services or added apps. They had little prior experience with the phone or tablet. The teacher gave the families her email address, if they needed to reach her through email. Kemala's parents were not used to sending or checking email and did not read or write in English, requiring outside support unavailable during ERT. The paper also indicated the platform that the students would use to access work and where parents could access grades. The SPED teacher indicated these would be updated weekly. Homework was assigned daily. Mr. Setiawan tried to assist her and her siblings but due to long work hours, he often got home after the children were asleep. Mrs. Setiawan took care of the children, prepared meals, and worked odd jobs. When she did have time to help with homework, she struggled because all the material was presented in English and her sister was not always available to help with translations.

Prior to ERT, the family relied on the library so that Kemala could access the materials that she would need and so that they could monitor her progress at home since they did not have a laptop or internet. As a newly arrived family and becoming accustomed to their new community, gaining access to a library and library card, as well as a learning platform, was overwhelming. When the family moved to online learning during ERT, their difficulties compiled with new responsibilities of supporting daily online work for each of their children. They no longer had access to the library and other direct support from their family or community.

Communication from the teacher about daily assignments was provided via the unfamiliar learning platform and in English only. Setting up meetings for IEP support seemed less important since all of their children were barely able to complete the assignments. Parent teacher conferences were only provided during the workday so Kemala's family were unable to attend due to work obligations. This resulted in many unfinished assignments and increased levels of stress and anxiety for the students and the family. Although their children had always done well in school, their grades dropped significantly and the family became disengaged with the school community.

Lack of culturally responsiveness when developing collaborative partnerships to support families with CLP is commonly attributed to ethnocentric assumptions about culturally and linguistically diverse families (Harry, 2008). The ways in which professionals support families with children with disabilities has the potential to enhance child and family outcomes (Dempsey & Keen, 2008), yet it requires information to be provided in a way that meets the family's needs. Families of children with disabilities are also members of communities around the world and their views related to how individuals with disabilities should be perceived, cared for, educated, and valued, largely depends on their culture. Various factors can impact these values, beliefs, and practices, which vary widely across cultures and change over the years (Ravindran & Myers, 2012).

Family Involvement: The UDL Approach

Involving the parents, by providing equitable access to resources and support, increases the social and cultural capital of the school and the community. Although parent involvement changes as the student ages, from direct academic support and heavy participation for elementary students to more future focused conversations and extracurricular support for older students (McNeal, 1999), the school and home partnership is still essential for the academic success of the student (Jeynes, 2005).

For students with CLP, connections to culture, family, and community influence self-efficacy, as well as expressed actions and behaviors (Correa-Chavez & Rogoff, 2009). Therefore, positive relationships between the school and the family can shape the students' academic, social, and emotional success exponentially (Burstall, 1975; Gardner, 1985; Wei & Zhou, 2012).

Positive and effective family involvement can be expressed in a variety of ways, such as attending school events, participating in PTO parent-teacher meetings, supporting learning at home, being involved in school decision-making, collaborating with the community, regular direct contact with teachers, and volunteering at school or school-related events (Epstein, 1987; Turney & Kao, 2009). Benefits of family involvement include: (a) communicating to the students that there is value in education and being involved in education; (b) opening networks to other families, teachers, school staff, and administration to build connection to school, comparing progress to other students, and working with others for positive change; (c) due to these relationships, teachers are more likely to communicate regularly with families about behavioral and academic concerns,

giving these families the opportunity to address the issues prior to the student deferring from a positive track (Domina, 2005).

When families enter the school community, they themselves also become students of new norms, roles, responsibilities, and community. Families with CLP who have children with disabilities may have added learning tasks, such as language, culture, and student supports. UDL guidelines offer research-based instructional guidelines for educators to examine content, instruction, and assessment to ensure it is both systematic and supports diverse learners (McMahon & Walker, 2019). Just as it is applied to students, it can also support families in their transition to the school community, including online learning.

According to CAST (2018), UDL is "a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights on how people learn" (p. 1). In the United States Higher Education Opportunity Act 2008, UDL is defined as a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practices that:

> (A) provide flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (B) reduce barriers in instruction; provide appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges; and maintain high achievement expectations for all students, including those with disabilities or limited English proficiency. (HEOA, 2008, p. 110)

UDL has three components: engagement, representation, and action and expression. With thoughtful planning, teachers can address diverse learners' abilities across all domains, while providing access and understanding of the information, engagement with the content, and allowing students to express what they know (Lowrey et al., 2017). Since UDL is increasingly becoming the framework of choice for educators, there is a strong need for additional research on implementation across multiple cultures and countries (Lowrey et al., 2017). In addition, little research has been done with UDL related to new technologies and students with CLP and disabilities and their families. McMahon and Walker (2019) stated, it is important teachers consider using new technologies to ensure an inclusive classroom environment as they strive for inclusion and accessibility, so that all students can benefit.

While UDL offers the ideal framework and guidelines for emerging technology, there is obviously not a strong base of peer reviewed articles (McMahon & Walker, 2019). The same could be said for collaboration with families with CLP and who have students with disabilities. Though research has not been done on collaboration, specifically with families with CLP and who have students with disabilities, UDL is research-based and aligning the principles to collaboration and technology will provide support to all families.

Each area takes on an adapted focus, as related to families. CLP families often lack experience with U.S. education, struggle with language barriers, and may also be isolated from community support. The UDL approach, as applied to families, converts the learning guidelines into equitable planning for including all families and students.

Application of UDL Approach toward Families

Engaging Families

According to CAST (2018), the engagement component focuses on providing a variety of formats to meet the various needs of the students and, in this case, the families. Parental or familial engagement through a UDL approach offers multiple methods of communication that are translated or provided in translatable formats, since communication is essential for meeting the needs of the students, especially those with severe needs (Pickl, 2011). Additional materials, school platforms, and documentation are continuously revised, ensuring that vocabulary, imagery, and messaging reflect a welcoming environment for all students and families. This includes recognizing that some parents or families might not have developed literacy skills in their preferred spoken language or may have a learning disability themselves (Panferov, 2010).

Offering appropriate and culturally responsive audio and visual aids to compliment communication with families is one way to provide multiple means of engagement. Another way would be to provide family workshops on how to communicate using translation tools, text-to-speech, and how to turn on closed captions or to access subtitles in additional languages, which can eliminate previous monolingual barriers.

Starting the year off with a survey to inquire about language needs and preferred format to receive information can set up the base for UDL school communication throughout the year. Such a survey should be provided in both written and audio formats, or offered by school-provided interpreters. It may seem impossible to represent all languages, but by using translation tools for dominant language(s), schools can redirect funding toward providing interpreters for underrepresented languages, including American Sign Language (ASL).

Providing a variety of communication platforms, such as Talking Points (platform), Google Translate, Microsoft Translator, and YouTube could improve school-home relationships and eliminate additional barriers for students with disabilities. The key to engaging parents and families of students with disabilities is that they feel welcomed, are connected, and become more actively involved in their students' education. Getting to know the students as individuals and as part of a collective group, including families, can set up a strong foundation for academic growth and social and emotional stability.

Representation for Families

According to CAST (2018), the representation component focuses on perception and comprehension of material presented to the students and families. As students and their families access online material and enter the remote classroom, they look around for familiarity, for connections, and for representations of values, beliefs, experiences, culture, and identity to scaffold understanding of an unfamiliar environment. Students with disabilities and their families with CLP are no different, as they scan the halls and classrooms for images and watch the actions of their peers and teachers for evidence of connections to themselves and their previous experiences.

UDL emphasizes the importance of representation of all the students in the classroom and in the curriculum, through a variety of materials provided focusing on perception, language, symbols, and comprehension. A family's identity and the portrayal of culture within those materials is an essential aspect for understanding and connecting to the school community (Sumaryono & Ortiz, 2004). This can be expressed, in part, by eliminating untranslatable idioms and writing in

clear simple language when inviting families to participate. Invitations to families can build community connections which can be helpful on multiple levels by providing educators, students, and family's new opportunities to learn about culture and cultural differences. Representation of collective and individual cultures can provide flexibility in the classroom, as well as for families. Welcoming entire families to events or parent-teacher conferences, rather than only one or two parents, and allowing indirect communication can accommodate collective cultures within what would otherwise be an individualistic culture.

It is also important to avoid converting the student into an interpreter for the parents or family member(s). This can undermine the authority of the parent or family member(s) and could place undue stress on the student. Use examples, images, and language that reflect the importance of shared responsibility between adults for the student's academic success, as well as recognizing the cultural importance of a community or family shared responsibility. Teachers can connect families to the weekly lessons through various formats including videos (with use of auto-translate feature), physical documents sent in the family's requested language, or a phone call with use of an interpreter or Google interpreter mode. Representation highlights student work (group and individual). Teachers can discover appropriate representation for the families by actively listening to what parents or families are interested in knowing about a student's school life. This might include a focus on non-academic aspects, such as respect shown to teacher(s) and relationships with other students. Educators and families can work together on creating a common family dictionary, similar to the whole-class dictionary that can help teachers understand family gestures and cultural references. These key connections can create positive home-school relationships to foster academic growth for students with CLP and disabilities.

Action & Expression of Families

According to CAST (2018), the action and expression component focuses on a variety of ways to motivate the learning environment as well as express understanding of material presented. Families form active parts of the school community through a variety of opportunities to participate. For a family with CLP and who has students with disabilities, providing a variety of accessible options and creating a welcoming environment is important for expression and active participation. One way to do this is to build a community (digitally & in-person) by creating language liaisons, who are parents or family members who represent cultural and linguistic connections. Another way is by communicating on a variety of platforms, including phone calls, text messages, videos, social media posts, home visits, and learning platforms.

Families can be invited to participate in school conversations through interpreted board meetings, family conferences, and school events. Families can also participate in courses provided by the school to role play, learning vocabulary related to school communication. Building these communities, including social media platforms, allow families to participate with peers in decisions, planning, communication, information-sharing, and cultural and social support, all of which are linked to a positive school environment. Parsons and Shim (2019), suggest inviting families to participate directly at school through community service opportunities, read alouds, cultural celebrations, career-sharing events, and language learning opportunities, which could also include English and ASL. While the use of developed technology can be used to reach highly represented groups, energy and funding should be concentrated toward reaching underrepresented groups by hiring interpreters and investigating those specific needs.

For students with disabilities, it is important that families are involved in the decision-making process of strategies and selecting assistive technology (AT) devices. Assigning AT to students is the first step to breaking down barriers. Providing technology, setting it up, providing tutorials and practice sessions, and designing check-ins for reporting at-home use are valuable parts of integrating vital AT for all students. Communication barriers due to limitations with technology can be reduced by schools and teachers utilizing multiple methods of communication through paper versions, email, text, phone calls, and home visits in a variety of languages.

In addition to technology support, authentic partnerships are built on how the school demonstrates the value of each part of the community by creating community nights, organizing neighborhood clean ups, inviting family member(s) to participate in events, etc. (Parsons & Shim, 2019). These opportunities give families a platform for expression by being an active part of planning, problem solving, and connecting to build an inclusive school environment for their student(s) and their families.

For those families that do not have a student who is learning a new language or does not have an identified disability, UDL still adds diversity and awareness for students and families, and in turn gives more access to all students.

Second Scenario
Safar Family Experience: Community Collaboration

Based on research, similar to scenario one, this second theoretical example provides an illustration of the application of UDL in the pre-ERT school. The three principles of UDL are incorporated throughout the family's experience, highlighting how the family is able to feel welcomed in the school, participate in the classroom, and collaborate with the teacher. Throughout the scenario, the school and teacher were able to take advantage of multiple opportunities to align UDL to support their school community helping students and their families be successful across multiple areas. The foundation of UDL principles prior to ERT allowed the school to equitably address the challenges that families and students faced in an unexpected disruption.

The Safar family moved from Afghanistan into a large school district in the U.S. that had students from over 34 different countries. Two of their children attended a large neighborhood middle school and two attended the local elementary school, which was within walking distance. Afghanistan, like Indonesia, is part of collectivist culture, where loyalty to the family supersedes all other obligations. Often, extended family members live in the home and it is the eldest male who is in control of final decisions especially related to money. The culture has a very rigid separation of gender roles with the men being responsible for finances and the women responsible for house work. While these have been clearly defined for centuries, often there are still women who are not allowed to leave the house without one of the men in the family.

The large school district recognizes aspects of the collectivist culture to the majority of families they serve and tries to ensure they recognize and incorporate these values into meeting the needs of the students and families. Both parents went together to each of the schools before the school year started, when they arrived they were pleasantly greeted. After the parents entered the office, the administrative assistant quickly realized English was not the family's first language. She handed them a piece of paper that had short phrases written in several different languages and indicated they should point to one. The parents smiled and picked their preferred language, Dari, one of the official languages of Afghanistan. Next, she led them to an area where there were tables and computers set up. She indicated for them to sit next to one and she sat by another next to them.

Then, the administrative assistant showed them where to click so that they would have all of the information pulled up in Dari. She walked them through each step indicating where to click and where to go next. Though her computer had the information in English, the information was the same in the same places and she had had training on how to present the information to parents with CLP.

Before the parents left the school, they were provided a two-page document written in Dari that provided them with information on how to get to the library and set up the accounts they would need. The school district had a partnership with the local libraries to support families with CLP. The libraries would help families set up email accounts so that they could access school information, establish an account for the school family portal where they could see their students' grades and missing assignments, and assist with navigating other technology-related issues.

While the school did not have a perfect system in place, the district was doing their best to help the families feel welcome and a part of the community. After Mrs. Safar had been helping Jahid, a 5th grader, for several weeks, she noticed it was taking him an extended period of time to complete assignments. She looked at the parent portal and noticed that his grades were really low in reading. Mrs. Safar expressed her concerns to her husband and they agreed to send an email to the teacher asking for information. The teacher set up a meeting for the next week, when the parents arrived there was an interpreter waiting for them. The communication at the meeting went smoothly and the Safar's were able to express their concerns.

Prior to ERT, Jahid's teacher provided the family with the option to meet virtually (using real-time translation) with other professionals to discuss additional evaluation options or adjustments to the IEP. Jahid's teacher expressed how diligently she had been working to meet all of the student's needs and to provide them all with access to the information through using translatable material, as well as, tutorials for families to familiarize themselves with the learning platform.

When they moved to online learning due to ERT, the family was already prepared to use the parent portal, learning platform, and had direct communication with the teacher using translation aids that they had previously learned to use.

When scheduling IEP meetings all family members were familiar with the options to join via their preferred languages because they had received video instructions on how to join the call. During the call the family and educators discussed important information about barriers to learning and strategies to implement at school and at home. These strategies included use of translation tools to access class materials, which the teacher had created as accessible documents. The family had established a relationship with the teacher prior to ERT using a text translating platform that allowed them to ask questions about lessons and inquire about supplementary materials.

As Jahid strived to achieve the goals from the IEP during ERT, the occupational therapist demonstrated to families how to utilize a variety of engaging virtual platforms. Additionally the family was supported by a previously established online parent community where they could ask questions, communicate with other parents, and revise any additional information that parents provided, all via use of translation aids. Although the transition to an online platform was difficult, Jahid and the family were able to adapt using the tools, resources, and support provided through a UDL model set up by the school prior to ERT. Jahid's grades remained consistent with those prior to ERT, as his engagement with the material was unchanged because his family was able to assist him through the process. The family participated in parent-teacher conferences, family virtual nights, and volunteered to help other newcomers the following year.

Blum, 2015, reinforced Jahid's experience in stating "When students feel connected to their classroom community (i.e. they feel like they are cared for as individuals and with their learning),

they are more likely to succeed academically" (as cited in Chertoff & Thompson, 2020, p.4). In the study done by Baran and AlZoubi (2020), students (& families) moved to ERT smoothly due to factors such as recognizing individual transition process and adapting using a flexible model (e.g., UDL) to address specific needs and circumstances. Families are often served and in some cases involved, but when they are engaged and eventually empowered, a more supportive community is created for families with CLP (Stefanski et al., 2016). By incorporating UDL principles as research-based practice applied to students and families, accessibility to the educational environment and school community is provided to all regardless of the teaching location or platform.

Summary & Conclusion

Many existing inequities for families with CLP and who have students with disabilities resurfaced or were intensified during ERT. These include: social economic impact, access to technology, lack of experience with the U.S. education system, contrasting cultural norms surrounding disabilities, and social isolation. The worsening vulnerabilities have escalated the growing academic, social, and emotional gap for these students and perpetuated the cycle for future generations.

As suggested in the research, increased family involvement has been reported to have a positive effect on student's academic achievement and social connections. Unfortunately, for most families, new roles and responsibilities in the school system are not innate and instead require a period of cultivation. UDL offers guidelines for optimizing teaching and learning that can also be applied to families. As additional research on the impact of ERT develops, especially on families with CLP and who have students with disabilities, application of UDL principles can alleviate some situational challenges that families with CLP and students with disabilities face.

Finally, educators can utilize the following UDL checklist and reflection as a simple companion to school objectives, communication for both whole-school and individual messaging, unit or lesson plans, curriculum design, IEP documentation, PTO meetings, board meetings, and school event planning. As the world moves back to in-person learning, the implementation of UDL approaches for students and families provides a promising future of inclusion, comprehension, and, most importantly, connection.

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