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Psy 324-02 Psychology of Exceptionality

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Fiedler, Craig R. et al. "A Checklist to Address Disproportionality in Special Education."

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The purpose of the article is to explain the development of a checklist designed to remedy disproportionality in special education. The article states the purpose of such a checklist and outlines the types of questions the checklist addresses. The authors hope the checklist may be a useful tool in developing more responsive educational practices so that children who do not need special education are not placed there.

Students with racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity (RCELD) are often overrepresented in special education. When this disproportionality exists, it can act as a self-fulfilling prophecy for students and teachers. Part of a reauthorization of IDEA was created to address this issue; policies and procedures are to be made to prevent overidentification of students with RCELD. One way that was made to address this issue was the Checklist to Address Disproportionality in Special Education (CADSE). The checklist is used to raise school staff's awareness of the problem and encourage problem-solving conversation. CADSE was made to help staff members ensure that special education resources are being used for students who genuinely need them. The CADSE consists of five elements: critical questions to guide school professionals in their discussions about teaching and assessing students with RCELD, help in identifying who is responsible for addressing each critical question, quality indicators that offer examples of appropriate educational responses to critical questions, a rubric to evaluate how well the school has addressed each critical question, and ways to show documentation for responses to critical questions. The first section of the checklist reviews the effectiveness of current general education classroom practices and services. The second section focuses on establishing early intervention programs including supports for specific classrooms and the school at large. This part encourages supplementary services for students with RCELD who show academic and behavioral deficiencies in a general education classroom. The third section pertains to students referred to special education; practices surrounding referral, assessment, and eligibility are examined.

The authors conclude that the CADSE has proven itself to raise educators' awareness about disproportionality. The checklist can begin discussions on the cultural climate in schools, classrooms, and IEP meetings. Disproportionality is not just a special education problem; addressing this issue will involve personnel in both special and general education. Professional development is also needed along with the CADSE evaluation. Also, educators should increase documentation for their reasons for special education services, but these should be in accord with other school forms so as not to create excessive paperwork.

I think the CADSE is a useful tool because it provides focused questions designed to evaluate the school's special education services. Sometimes the hardest part of reform is knowing which questions to ask. However, many of the indicators of quality and rubric responses do not sound very specific but speak in generalities; the process comes off as being very subjective. Because of this, I agree that professional development should accompany the checklist so that professionals know what "behavioral support at the appropriate level and duration" looks like (59). There will be an increase in paperwork no matter how much CADSE is "aligned with existing school initiatives and other forms... to avoid the perception of excessive paperwork," so teachers need to be supported through professional development (57).