English Learners: Learning Barriers
Est. Time: 50-60 Minutes

Objective

To discuss potential barriers to learning for students with disabilities who are culturally and linguistically different.

Overview

Culturally proficient educational leaders must be able to see the process of teaching and learning from the social context of the learners. An important component of this teaching-learning dynamic is to see the barriers that exist for some, but not all, learners. When educators acknowledge and consider these barriers in preparing instructional materials, they provide for more equitable learning opportunities.

Activity

Review Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. Learn more about the six institutional processes that can pose barriers to learning for students with disabilities who are culturally and linguistically diverse:

- **Content**—A curriculum that projects only one cultural experience.
- **Delivery**—Instruction that emphasizes lower-order thinking skills (memorization, learning by rote, recitation of the one right answer). Even students with reduced cognitive abilities can be prompted by appropriate teacher questioning techniques to higher-order thinking
- **Expectations**—Preconceptions based on stereotypical views of the learners.
- **Assessment**—Evaluation of progress or achievement that is solely compliance oriented.
- **Resources**—Culturally inadequate resources that continue and maintain inappropriate policies and practices.
- **Outside involvement**—Biased parent and community involvement that caters to the most influential parents and community members.

Questions/Discussion Topics

1. How do you think these processes negatively affect learning?

2. List possible strategies that school leaders might use to prevent these barriers.

3. Using your experience and knowledge in the field of education, define the term "culturally responsive practice." Share your definition with others in the class. What elements are common across the definitions?

4. Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming" (p. 29). How does your response compare to hers?

5. As a school leader, how can you promote culturally responsive instruction in your school?