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What can be done to improve fairness in the identification process of diverse learners?

Teachers play an important role in the identification process of diverse learners. Teachers make observations, assumptions and assessments, which starts the identification process. In order to improve fairness, teachers have to be trained to respond to the needs of the diverse learners in their classrooms. Culturally responsive teaching is a strategy that has been shown to lessen cultural dissonance. "Traditional classrooms usually reflect the dominant culture and as a result dissonance can occur between the cultural environment of the classroom and that of some diverse learners". (Friend, pg 71). Since cultural dissonance can result in academic and behavioral problems, a teacher who has an understanding and respect for his/her students' cultural values, norms, behavioral characteristics, and learning styles, will be less likely to make the wrong assumptions about a student's academic ability or behavior.

Systemic Bias, which has a rippling effect on all aspects of learning, is a problem that is so embedded in our society that students of color continue to suffer because of these biases. Students of color are more likely to be placed in special education settings than their white counterparts. Instructional approaches that teachers use can predispose some students to failure. (Friend) Some teachers enter the classroom with preconceived notions about certain ethnic and racial groups. Some groups are thought of as being more intelligent than others, while some are thought of as having more behavioral problems than others. By changing attitudes and the way instructions are given and not using the 'one size fits all' approach, all students will have an equal opportunity to succeed.

Early intervention also improves fairness in the identification process of diverse learners. Response to intervention (RTI) and Multi-tiered System of Support as Solutions (MTSS) are proactive methods of identifying and supporting students with behavioral and learning needs. It provides teachers with the information needed to improve student learning and performance. "RTI and MTSS have been signaled as a means to reduce the overrepresentation of African American students and other at-risk groups in some special education categories such as learning disabled and intellectually disabled" (Friend pg. 76)

These are all ways to improve fairness in the identification process but in order for true fairness to be realized, the system has to change. Our schools are more culturally diverse. Yet, some school or classroom libraries are void of authors from other cultures, other than the dominant culture. A teacher's implicit biases can be subtle and unintentional but can still impact the decisions he or she makes. However, a teacher's knowledge, preparation and the willingness to be fair to all students will improve fairness in the identification process.

What are some instructional methods commonly used for ELLs?

Some commonly used instructional methods for ELLs Bilingual education, English as a Second Language and sheltered English. In bilingual education the most common approach is the transitional approach. This approach uses the student's native language for instructions, then transfers to instructions in English when the student has mastered the English language. Another approach is the maintenance, which is a long term bilingual approach that helps the student to develop competence in both English and their native language. English as a Second Language is a method of direct instructions given to students in English only. Students are taught in a general education classroom or a separate classroom. In the Sheltered English concrete objects and gestures are used to convey meaning. Teachers also use context clues like pictures to foster understanding.(Friend, pgs. 82,83)

These approaches all have advantages and disadvantages. I can't imagine what it must be like for the ELL who has to receive instructions in only English. The English language is very complex, even for a native speaker. "The students strengths, interests, cognitive style and facility with English must be considered in selecting the best approach"(Friend).

What are the unique Challenges of developing collaborative partnerships with culturally diverse parents and what is the 5 phase model employed by Shea and Bauer?

Often for diverse parents, the language barrier is a challenge. Students often serve as interpreters for their parents and vital information can get lost in these translations. Some parents might feel intimidated by school professionals who may not understand their language, culture or customs. Lack of knowledge about their child's school curriculum, school policies, and educational and socioeconomic background of parents, can also affect how they view these collaborations. Parents may have negative views about the school system, that they themselves were a part of as students. Unfair practices, biases and the systemic racial inequalities that plague our educational institutions, can have a negative impact on family/school engagement. Also, some teachers are reluctant to engage with parents from other cultures.

The five phase model employed by Shea and Bauer include intake and assessment,selection of goals, planning and implementing activities, evaluation of activities and review. During the intake and assessment process families and educators figure out what educational needs are to be met for both the family and teacher. The next phase is the selection of goals, where goals about the previously specified needs are set(how are these goals going to be met) . In the planning and implementing activities phase the activities are planned to get the desired outcome of the goals set. The evaluation of activities phase is where collaborators discuss how the process is moving along. Is everyone doing what they're supposed to do and is the plan working for both parties? Finally, in the review phase, the outcome is reviewed. Were the goals met or are there changes to be made? This collaborative process includes the parent in the

student's educational plan. Parents will be more inclined to reach out to teachers, with questions regarding classroom instructions, available resources and other matters that will help foster a better learning environment for the students.