Core Function → **Instructional Practices**

Effective Practice → **All ELs have access to comprehensible, grade-level, standards-based instruction in all content areas**

Success Indicator IN06: The school leaders and faculty review curricula and assessments to make sure materials are historically accurate, culturally relevant, and anti-bias. (5883)

Overview: In order to "create and sustain systems of support for classroom teachers to [enable them] to work effectively with EL students" (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014, p. 338), school and district leadership must prioritize offering a vision of effective EL instruction (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). One key component of a system of support is ensuring that teachers have access to culturally and linguistically diverse instructional materials and assessments that are historically accurate and culturally appropriate to address ELs' instructional needs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Elfers, Lucero, Stritikus, & Knapp, 2013) so that they can access grade-level and standards-based instruction. Schools must carefully review curricula and assessments for their appropriateness to ensure that they do not hinder EL progress because they contain bias, are irrelevant to their culture, or are historically inaccurate (Colorado Department of Education, 2010).

Questions: Why do curricula and assessments for ELs need to be screened to ensure they are culturally relevant, historically accurate, and anti-bias? How can faculty and school leaders review EL curricula and assessments to ensure fairness and accuracy?

Why do curricula and assessments for ELs need to be screened to ensure they are culturally relevant, historically accurate, and anti-bias?

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) has been used successfully for ELs across a variety of content areas, including science (e.g., Johnson, 2011; Johnson, Bolshakova, & Waldron, 2016); math (e.g., Fulton, 2009); social studies (e.g., Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, 2011; Choi, 2013); and English language arts (e.g., Bui & Fagan, 2013; Feger, 2006). Gay (2013) describes 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 to and effective for them" (pp. 49-50). Culturally responsive curricula include the histories and views of marginalized people of color who are framed as active agents within history and society (Banks, 2006; Howard, 2004). A variety of studies have demonstrated how using culturally relevant materials can engage ELs and promote success (e.g., Bui & Fagan, 2013; Choi, 2013; Feger, 2006; Souryasack & Lee, 2007). Unfortunately, culturally relevant and historically accurate curricula and assessments are often scarce, particularly at the secondary level (Council of the Great City Schools, 2017; Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Rumberger, 2008; Movit, Petrykowska, & Woodruff, 2010). Researchers have noted that instructional materials often do not allow students to feel connected to the curriculum as they frequently do not represent diverse cultures or address controversial issues such as racism (Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, 2011; Loewen, 2007, as cited in Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ndura, 2004). Textbooks and state learning standards often represent people of color as marginal to the "true story" of national progress, which, when coupled with teachers' fear of encouraging painful or difficult conversations about race, often leads to the absence of discussion about people of color in history classrooms (Branch, 2003; Loewen, 2007). For example, history textbooks often distort historical contexts

leading up to some of today's most dire social ills, such as some textbooks' portrayal of the South's secession from the US prior to the Civil War as a decision to maintain state's rights, rather than preserve slavery (Wong, 2015).

Similarly, research shows that many assessments contain assumptions about language, culture, values and experiences that ELs do not share with non-ELs (Nelson-Barber, 2011). For example, some ELs may come from countries that operate on a cash economy where credit is never used to pay for items; these students may be less likely to understand the concept of credit than their US-born peers and may struggle with math test word problems that address the calculation of interest, payments, etc. These biases can introduce measurement error into assessments that can affect instructional decision-making, educational placement into programs, and the accuracy of comparisons of student achievement (Abedi, 2009; Kim & Zabelina, 2015). Some experts recommend that linguistic/cultural experts be included within item development processes to reduce construct-irrelevant variance (Abedi, 2009; Nelson-Barber, 2011). However, culture-free assessments do not exist in practice because culture and cultural context are inextricably woven into language (The Education Alliance, Brown University, n.d.). Nevertheless, assessments should be culturally responsive by incorporating content that is both understandable to the learner, and free of elements that may convey cultural bias (The Education Alliance, Brown University, n.d.). States should encourage districts and schools to consider test biases when selecting assessments for their student populations (Atchison, Diffy, Rafa, & Sarubbi, 2017).

How can faculty and school leaders review EL curricula and assessments to ensure fairness and accuracy?

CRT requires that Instructional materials and assessments for ELs convey respect for diverse cultures and are culturally relevant to the students served. Instructional materials (including digital) should be free of negative stereotypes, and address sensitive topics with respect and historical accuracy, including carefully chosen videos and images to develop ELs background and provide context (Council of the Great City Schools, 2017). Teachers and school leaders can review curricula and assessment for anti-bias, historical accuracy, and cultural relevance by addressing questions such as:

Curricula (adapted from Krasnoff, 2016):

1. Does the curriculum provide for a balanced study of world cultures, and include learning activities that promote appreciation for non-European cultures?
2. Does the curriculum include information about the past and present experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds?
3. Are issues and perspectives of minority groups included?
4. If the curriculum contains biased information or stereotypes, is this pointed out and are students provided with more accurate information?
5. Do classroom displays and instructional materials include positive representations of diverse international and domestic cultures?

Assessment (adapted from The Education Alliance, Brown University, n.d.):

1. Are there enough supporting details so that students can comprehend the cultural content being provided in test items?
2. Do the testing materials show bias that relates to ethnicity, sex, culture, religion, class, or processes?
3. Have members of different cultural groups been represented, and are these members positively portrayed?
4. Have the test developers made sure that the cultural content is comprehensible to all the test takers?
5. Is cultural content about the students' home culture and language accurate and up-to-date?

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Resources

For many practical tools and strategies for ensuring that EL instructional materials are culturally relevant see:

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