

## Chapter 6

# Culturally Responsive Teaching and Inclusion for Online Students With Exceptionalities and Other Needs

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### ABSTRACT

*Teaching learning-diverse students, English learners (ELs), and students with disabilities has become of paramount importance as it relates to each unique student's need, directed by an Individual Education Plan (IEP), 504, English Language Plan, and related services, especially for those students served primarily under the Individual Disabilities Education Act. The students' unique cultural and familial needs also become important used to promote achievement in both the F2F and online educational setting, inclusive of multiple intelligences (MI), learning styles, and appropriate differentiated instruction. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the learners and the diversity that they bring to the online learning community so that instructors may prepare culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogy and online universally designed learner-centered (UDLC) and differentiated practices that include them beyond their disability or exceptionality and to become culturally responsive instructional leaders (CRIL).*

### INTRODUCTION

As online teaching transforms what higher education looks like for many students, so too are the students transforming how they learn and together practitioners are examining what learning looks like for all students. Especially important are some of the learning diverse students, many who bring with them diverse learning and instructional needs that require accommodations and supports within the online and or distance educational classroom (Hardy & Huang, 2011; Heitner & Jennings, 2016). The literature has rarely engaged what culturally responsive or inclusive teaching and pedagogy looks like for online learners who possess special education, linguistically diverse needs and or exceptionalities (Woodley,

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Hernandez, Parra & Negash, 2017). Additionally, instructional practices must be constructive and co-create a learning environment that entails more than just break out rooms (BORS) and synchronous and asynchronous instruction; but instead must include sacred spaces where learning diverse students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) and exceptional backgrounds can garner the supports that they need in order to be more fully included within all aspects of the online learning classroom (Taliaferro, 2011; Tan et al., 2010; Yi, 2013).

Overall, the during last decade institutions of higher education have seen an increase in online teaching platforms, many that utilize Blackboard, Moodle, D2L and now Canvas (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010). To this end, very little literature has examined the intersections of the learner with this evolving technology including their ‘special needs’ that are often encapsulated within legal parameters such as the American Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 and at the K-12 level, the Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Students who possess these learning differences are often presented with supports for services and face to face (F2F) assistance across their K-21 experiences that focus on the tools, not the conceptual features of the online classroom space. As such, it is not uncommon for many students with learning disabilities at the higher education or post-secondary education level to avoid online learning altogether for fear of the unknown (Hardin & Huang, 2011). However, given the advent of K-12 online cyber schools and now pop-up online district programs, each has in kind also produced a large number of technologically equipped online learners who also possess learning-diverse needs, in addition to learning disabilities (Chuang, 2016; Hardin & Huang, 2016; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Sleeter, 2012).

## **Purpose of the Chapter**

Teaching students with disabilities has become of paramount importance as it relates to each unique student’s need, directed by an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and related services under the IDEA (2004). The Act also recognizes students’ legal right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and their need to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) consistent with specific and measurable goals as indicated in the IEP. Even within the IEP, the type of instruction and pedagogy used to increase student achievement is of the utmost importance for students with both exceptional and special needs. The effectiveness of the IEP also hinges upon the types of family and community collaboration beyond the students’ disability, an area of study that is commonly overlooked (Wang, 2007; Williams, 2013). Hence, on this conceptual schema, the students’ unique cultural and familial needs become paramount in promoting achievement in both the F2F and online educational setting, inclusive of multiple intelligences (MI), learning styles and appropriate differentiated instruction. Students with English Learner (EL) needs must also be given culturally competent and inclusive consideration within an online learning context. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the CLD learner with exceptional needs and the diversity that they bring to the online learning community so that instructors may prepare culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogy and online Universally Designed Learner-Centered (UDLC) practices that include them, beyond their disability or exceptionality (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Students who are enrolled in both K-12 and post-secondary educational contexts that include online learning in distance education courses commonly encounter not only transitional obstacles with second

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