

2

Using a Culturally Responsive Framework to Meet the Needs of ELs



Ms. Kay, an elementary ESOL teacher, receives a new student from Saudi Arabia. Ameena, a beginner English learner, is reserved and quiet. Ms. Kay is happy when she is contacted by Mrs. Khouri, Ameena's mother, who requests a time to meet to discuss how she could support Ameena at home. Mrs. Khouri is literate in English and speaks English with intermediate fluency. She never communicates with her daughter in English, but now that their family has relocated to the United States, her mother wants to work with her daughter at home to help support what she is working on in school. Ms. Kay thinks that this kind of parent involvement is very exciting to see and will help Ameena on her language development path.

During the parent-teacher meeting, Mrs. Khouri asks if Ms. Kay could gather some materials that she could use at home to work with Ameena. Ms. Kay promises to collect materials for her and send them home the next day. The following day, Ms. Kay sends home several workbooks to build literacy skills, a few books of short stories, and a list of websites. On the following Monday after the meeting, Mrs. Khouri returns the completed workbooks, along with printouts from the practice websites showing Ameena's progress on practice games and activities. Ms. Kay is surprised, as she never anticipated that Mrs. Khouri would have Ameena complete all of the work in a week.

She thought the materials would be used over the course of the marking period. Ameena is clearly overtaxed by such focused practice and no longer wants to participate in activities with Ms. Kay's small group.

How might culture have impacted Mrs. Khouri and Ms. Kay's expectations in this scenario? What steps might Ms. Kay take next?

As the opening scenario shows, culture can have a profound role in expectations for teaching and learning. Ms. Kay didn't understand that she was seen by Mrs. Khouri as the master and scholar. In addition, Ameena's mother and her teacher had different understandings of the pace at which the practice work should be completed. Because of the significant impact that culture can have in the work you do with ELs, we have decided to position our discussion of strategies within a framework of culturally responsive instruction. It is our intention that as you work through Chapters 3–9 in this book, you will refer back to this chapter and consider the cultural implications for your instruction, assessment, and general interactions with ELs and their families. We recognize that those of you who are choosing to read this book may be more informed and more passionate about the instruction of ELs than others that you work with. It is our hope that this chapter will also provide you with some strategies and talking points that you can use to strengthen your role as an EL advocate.

In this chapter, we will define *culture* and characteristics of culture, discuss the importance of cultural understanding for your work with ELs, and provide strategies to support culturally responsive teaching. We will also ask you to step outside your comfort zone and think critically about your own culture and how it shapes your instruction, your classroom expectations, and your interactions with students.

What Is Culture?

While there are many, varied definitions of culture, it is generally understood that culture is “a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to interact with their world and with one another” (Zion & Kozleski, 2005, p. 3). To frame our discussion of culture and culturally responsive instruction, we would like to highlight a few key ideas in regard to culture.

How do you define culture? Why is an understanding of culture important for your work with ELs?

- **Culture is complex and dynamic** (Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko, & Stuczynski, 2011). Understanding culture can be a challenge because culture is always changing, because it can manifest itself in different ways, and because many aspects of culture are invisible. Due to historical, political, or pop-culture shifts, as well as generational changes in attitudes, values, and behaviors, culture is ever evolving.
- **We are each members of different cultural groups, but there is no way of evaluating that the ways of one cultural group are better**

than the ways of another (Erickson, 2007). In addition, our connection to specific cultures and how the culture manifests itself in our ideas and behaviors can change throughout our lives. For example, when we are young, we may align ourselves closely with the culture of our parents, but as we are exposed to new ideas and experiences, our cultural identity can change.

- **There is great variability of cultures within social groups** (Erickson, 2007). For example, Bolivian culture in Bolivia is different from Bolivian culture as it appears in a Bolivian community in Virginia.¹ Even members of the same family can be culturally diverse. This is an important idea in connection to the ELs whom you work with because their culture(s) may be different from their parents' culture(s). This concept may be particularly true for ELs who were born in the United States. Second-generation immigrants are often pulled between the culture of their families and the culture that they learn at school or in the community (Stroink & Lalonde, 2009). Accordingly, it is important to avoid overgeneralizing aspects of culture (e.g., "Mexicans like to . . .") or asking one student to speak on behalf of his or her culture or nationality.
- **There are three different levels of culture.** An analogy is often made between these three levels and an iceberg (Hall, 1976). The elements of culture that are (1) visible (at the surface level), such as food, clothing, and language, are understood to carry a low emotional load. At this surface-level of culture, people expect that there will be cultural differences, and these differences are less likely to cause conflict or misunderstandings between people or groups of people (Hammond, 2015). However, the invisible elements of culture that include both (2) shallow and (3) deep culture are much more likely to carry an emotional weight. Figure 2.1 provides an overview of these three levels of culture, along with a definition and examples of each.

As you look at Figure 2.1, think of a time when a difference in shallow or deep culture caused a conflict between you and someone else. How did you resolve the conflict?

FIGURE 2.1 Three Levels of Culture

Level of Culture	Definition	Examples
Surface	Comprises concrete elements of culture that can be seen; carries low emotional load	Food, clothing, celebrations, music, literature, and dance
Shallow	Comprises the cultural rules for everyday communication and behavior; carries strong emotional charge, and differences can lead to misunderstandings and disagreements	Beliefs about time, concepts of personal space, nonverbal communication patterns, and relationship to authority
Deep culture	Comprises the unspoken knowledge and unconscious understandings in how we relate to others and the world; carries substantial emotional charge, and differences at this level can lead to culture shock	Ideas about cooperation and collaboration, notions of justice, and concepts of self

Source: Adapted from Hammond, Z. (2015). Culture tree (p. 24).

1. There are also variations of Bolivian culture within Bolivia.

APPLICATION ACTIVITY 2.1

My Multicultural Self²

In order to think more about your own culture, answer Questions 1–4 that follow.

1. Make a list of all of the cultural groups that you belong to (e.g., Mexican American, female, Jewish, gay). Then, consider which ones you identify with most, and put a star next to those.

2. Describe a time that you felt proud to be a member of one of these cultural groups.

3. Describe a time that you found it challenging to be a member of one of these cultural groups.

2. Adapted from Gorski, P. (2015). Circles of my multicultural self. Retrieved from <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/circlesofself.html>

4. What made the difference between the two times?

In this activity, we hope you recognized the complexity and emotional charge that can come with being a member of a specific cultural group, especially when confronted with the norms, values, and beliefs of a different cultural group. Saifer et al. (2011) explain that the coming together of diverse cultures creates what they call a *cross-cultural zone*, which includes such elements and emotions as acculturation, cultural privilege, historical mistrust and guilt, fear, anger, and curiosity (p. 10). How we are able to navigate in such cross-cultural zones will shape our relationships with individuals from other cultures.

Why Does Culture Matter for ELs' Teaching and Learning?

APPLICATION ACTIVITY 2.2

Ms. Montrose's Classroom

Read the scenario that follows, and then, answer the discussion questions.

Scenario: Ms. Montrose is a sixth-grade language arts teacher in a rural school with few ELs. The ELs in her class are from Guinea, India, and South Korea. She regularly includes discussion activities in her lessons and expects students to be active participants in these discussions. She selects discussion prompts that she hopes will encourage debate, as well as close analysis of the texts that the class is reading. Ms. Montrose has worked with the ESOL teacher to develop the

language scaffolding that her ELs may need to participate, including vocabulary instruction, sentence stems, and word banks. However, she has been frustrated by her ELs' participation in these discussions. Some of her ELs contribute very little, and in general, they tend to avoid controversial topics. Ms. Montrose thinks that several of her ELs aren't very motivated to be successful in her class, and she is at a loss for what more she can do to encourage these students to be more active in the discussions.

Discussion Questions

1. What impact might culture have on ELs' participation in classroom discussions?
2. What might be preventing Ms. Montrose's ELs from being more active participants in the class discussions?
3. What might Ms. Montrose do to support greater participation on the part of her ELs? Consider linguistic supports, student groupings, and other types of support she could offer.

Culture impacts students' and teachers' beliefs about education and learning. It can impact ELs' ways of communicating, their classroom participation and behavior, and their expectations for the role of the teacher (Zion & Kozleski, 2005). Similarly, culture has an effect on educators' expectations for students, their ways of communicating with students, and their classroom management. This means that the expectations for student behavior and communication at home could be significantly different than the expectations for a student behavior and communication at school (Delpit, 1995; Ogbu, 2003). A home-school mismatch may arise when students come to school with learning styles, discourse behaviors, or values of education that are different from their teachers (Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, Lopez, & Dunbar, 1994). Such a mismatch can be detrimental to student learning and also the relationship between the student and the teacher. Accordingly, teachers need to recognize this mismatch and support students in learning the expectations of the teacher and the school (Delpit, 1995). Students also need support in learning how to function within and across cultures, so as to emphasize that no one culture is better than another.

For example, in the scenario discussed earlier, Ms. Montrose had specific expectations for what student engagement and participation looked like, and when her ELs did not meet those expectations, she questioned their motivation. There are several things that might be standing in the way of student participation from a linguistic perspective, including students having sufficient understanding of the content and the structure of the discussion activities. However, Ms. Montrose should also explore cultural differences that may be preventing some ELs from participating and should

be explicit with her students about expectations for academic discussions in her classroom. For example, she could engage in a discussion with her students about how norms for discussions and debate vary from culture to culture and even within cultures. She should also provide models of academic discussions that students can use to inform their understanding of her expectations. It would be important for Ms. Montrose to make sure that she does not call out, stigmatize, or make ELs feel unwelcome during these discussions. One possibility might be to use video clips to highlight cultural differences.

How Can I Begin to Understand How My Cultural Expectations May Differ From Those of My ELs and the Impact This Will Have in the Classroom?

Becoming aware of how your cultural expectations may differ from those of your ELs is a two-part process that will lead you to becoming a more culturally competent educator. The first part of the process is to reflect on the cultural values and beliefs that shape your expectations in the classroom. The second part of the process is learning more about the ELs you work with and recognizing how their values and beliefs may be different from your own. In order to think more about your own cultural values connected to education, complete the following application activity.

Reflecting on My Cultural Beliefs and Expectations

APPLICATION ACTIVITY 2.3

Reflecting on My Cultural Beliefs and Expectations

For each of the topics listed in Figure 2.2, write down your beliefs or expectations for your students associated with the topic. When you are finished, compare your responses with the information in Figure 2.3 that follows, and answer the discussion questions. As we have already mentioned in this chapter, it is important to recognize that these ideas are generalizations and will not apply to all students from a particular culture.

FIGURE 2.2 Reflecting on My Cultural Beliefs and Expectations

Topic	Your Beliefs and/or Expectations
Punctuality (How do you feel about students arriving on time for class or families arriving on time for school events?)	
Role of teacher in class (What do you think is the teacher's role in terms of managing a class, interacting with students, and supporting student learning?)	
Student participation in discussions (What are your expectations for what student participation looks like during a class discussion?)	
Student nonverbal communication (What are your expectations for how students should communicate nonverbally with you and with other students?)	
Student interactions with teacher (What are your expectations in terms of how [or if] a student should address a teacher, ask questions, or disagree with a teacher?)	
Independent versus collaborative learning (What are your expectations for when students should work independently? What are your expectations for when and how they should work collaboratively?)	
Plagiarism (What do you expect students to understand about what it means to plagiarize and how to avoid plagiarism?)	

FIGURE 2.3 Reflecting on My Cultural Beliefs and Expectations

Topic	Cultural Considerations
Punctuality	<i>Chronemics</i> refers to individuals' perceptions of time and whether the timing of things is seen as precise or more fluid. From culture to culture, the importance of punctuality can vary greatly (Steinberg, 2007). In the United States, arriving more than several minutes late to a function can be considered rude. However, in other cultures (e.g., African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American), arriving late is not considered impolite.
Role of teacher in class	The role of the teacher may vary between collectivist and individualist cultures. Collectivist cultures are those in which group goals and needs are generally placed above individual needs. In contrast, individualist cultures tend to value individual goals, individual rights, and independence. Students from collectivist cultures (e.g., Mexican, Korean, and Somali) may have been taught that they should show respect for teachers at all times by carefully listening to their teacher and not asking questions or disagreeing (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). Group harmony is considered most important. In contrast, students from individualist cultures (e.g., Australian, German, or U.S.) recognize that they will be valued for sharing their unique ideas and opinions. They also tend to expect a more student-centered approach to teaching and learning.
Student participation in discussions	Whether ELs are from high-context cultures or low-context cultures may impact how they participate in discussions. In high-context cultures (e.g., Afghanistani, El Salvadoran, or Thai), it is expected that individuals will gain meaning from the context or situation, and some ideas may be assumed rather than stated. In contrast, members of low-context cultures (e.g., Swiss, Israeli, or U.S.) are less likely to rely on the situation and other contextual elements (e.g., body language or tone of voice) and tend to communicate information more directly. As a result,

Topic	Cultural Considerations
	<p>students from high-context cultures may participate in discussions differently than students from low-context cultures. For example, both students and teachers from a high-context culture tend to be more indirect—that is to say, more implicit and vague—when asked a question or discussing a particular issue in the classroom (Al-Issa, 2005; Hall, 1976). On the other hand, students and teachers from low-context cultures are more straightforward and explicit in their communication style.</p> <p>In addition, students from a collectivist culture may believe that the survival and success of the group ensures the well-being of the individual, so that by considering the needs and feelings of others, one protects oneself. Harmony and interdependence of group members are stressed and valued. These values may make it difficult for a student from a collectivist culture to disagree with another student (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008).</p>
<p>Student nonverbal communication (including gestures, distance when speaking to someone, and eye contact)</p>	<p>Nonverbal communication patterns can vary greatly from culture to culture, and the rules regarding these behaviors are often unspoken (Steinberg, 2007). ELs may need explicit guidance in cultural expectations in this area. For example, the personal distance that two speakers are expected to maintain when speaking may vary between cultures. In the United States, it is considered strange to stand extremely close to someone you are conversing with. Eye contact is another example. Some ELs may come from cultures where it is considered impolite to look an adult in the eye, or direct eye contact may be a perceived challenge (e.g., Asian, African, and Latino cultures). Eye contact between opposite sexes is often seen as inappropriate in Middle Eastern cultures.</p>
<p>Student interactions with teacher (e.g., how to address teacher, asking questions, or disagreeing)</p>	<p>In some cultures, there is greater <i>power distance</i> between leaders and followers than in other cultures. Power distance refers to how people from a specific culture view power relationships. For example, in high-power-distance cultures (e.g., Guatemalan, Malaysian, and Saudi Arabian), the relationship between a teacher and a student would be very formal and respectful. In these cultures, there tends to be more focus on titles, formality, and authority. Students from these cultures may not feel comfortable talking to teachers, and parents may take the teacher’s word without question (Hofstede, 2003). In contrast, in cultures where there is less power distance (e.g., Dutch, Norwegian, or U.S.), relationships are usually more informal. Parents may work together with teachers for the student’s best interest, and the teacher may provide a more student-centered classroom, giving choice and autonomy to students.</p>
<p>Independent versus collaborative learning</p>	<p>Students from collectivist cultures (e.g., Japanese, Brazilian, and Indian) may value working together interdependently rather than working alone independently. Contributing to a group’s well-being is valued more than one’s individual achievement (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). In contrast, students from individualist cultures (e.g., Greek, New Zealand, or U.S.) may see greater value in working independently towards individual goals and achievement.</p>
<p>Plagiarism</p>	<p>The concept of plagiarism is built on the understanding that ideas can be owned and that individuals have rights to intellectual property (Pennycook, 1996). These ideas may seem strange to students who have different cultural views about the nature of information and public discourse (Adiningrum & Kutieleh, 2011). Plagiarism tends to be culturally conditioned and may be understood differently in various cultures (Pennycook, 1996; Sowden, 2005). For example, in some Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, students are permitted to quote or paraphrase political and religious authorities without citing them specifically because it is understood that the reader will know the original source of the information (Howard, 1999). Additionally, ELs with lower levels of English proficiency may struggle to paraphrase challenging texts and will need significant support to do so.</p>

Source: Adapted from Hiatt, J. E., Jones-Vo, S., Staehr Fenner, D., & Snyder, S. (2017). Understanding how culture impacts your expectations for your students handout.

Discussion Questions

1. What did you notice about how your cultural beliefs and expectations may differ from those of your ELs?
2. How might you address these differences in your classroom?

Learning About My ELs

In addition to reflecting on the impact culture has on your teaching and your expectations for students, you also need to take steps to learn about your ELs. We have included some suggestions for how to do this in the list that follows. Figure 2.4 provides a tool that you can complete as you learn more about each EL you work with.

- Look for opportunities for students to share about themselves, their families, and their backgrounds and experiences. You can build activities into instruction that ask students to describe their families, their home, their responsibilities, how they spend their time outside of school, and their literacy practices (e.g., the types of things they read, watch, and listen to outside of school) (Staehr Fenner, 2014). When you are asking students to describe their backgrounds and experiences, it is important to be clear that you are not asking students to speak for an entire cultural group.

FIGURE 2.4 What I Know About My EL

Name:	Country of birth:
Home language: Can student read and write in home language? _____ Fluently _____ Somewhat _____ No	English proficiency level: English language proficiency scores Composite (the combined score): Speaking: Reading Listening: Writing:
Educational experiences (e.g., amount of time in U.S. schools, educational experience in home country, or any interrupted schooling):	
Family background (e.g., who student lives with or family separation or reunification):	
Student interests:	
Student plans and/or goals:	

- Take opportunities to talk with students informally (e.g., at lunch, after school, or on field trips), and get to know more about them.
- Collaborate with other educators to find out relevant background information on ELs (e.g., home language or educational experiences).
- Attend school and community events that your ELs and their families attend.
- Conduct home visits with ELs and their families (as appropriate). It can be effective to visit in the beginning of the year as a get-to-know-each-other activity and limit discussions about behavior and academic progress.
- Research general information about your ELs' home cultures and important features of their home languages (Staehr Fenner, 2014).

APPLICATION ACTIVITY 2.4

Mr. Gerard's Classroom

Read the scenario, and answer the discussion questions that follow.

Scenario: Mr. Gerard, an elementary school music teacher, has a new student in his class from Indonesia. He looks at her name on the attendance list, and then he asks her what her name is. She responds, "Cinta Hartono." Mr. Gerard immediately feels uncomfortable with this unfamiliar name and asks, "Can I call you Cindy?" Cinta agrees that would be fine.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the underlying message that Mr. Gerard is sending to Cinta about her home language and culture?
2. What steps could Mr. Gerard take to become more comfortable learning and using the names of students that might be unfamiliar to him?

What Is Culturally Responsive Pedagogy?

Once you have begun to recognize how culture impacts who you are as an educator, as well as learned more about the backgrounds and experiences of your ELs, you can apply this new or more nuanced understanding to your teaching. Culturally responsive educators draw on the cultural

knowledge, backgrounds, and experiences of their students in order to make the learning more meaningful. Ladson-Billings (1994) developed the term *culturally relevant teaching* to describe “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 18).

In order to have a clearer understanding of what culturally responsive pedagogy is, it may be helpful to first understand what it is not. Nieto (2016) explains that “culturally responsive pedagogy is not

- A predetermined curriculum
- A specific set of strategies
- A watering down of the curriculum
- A ‘feel-good’ approach
- Only for students of particular backgrounds” (p. 1).

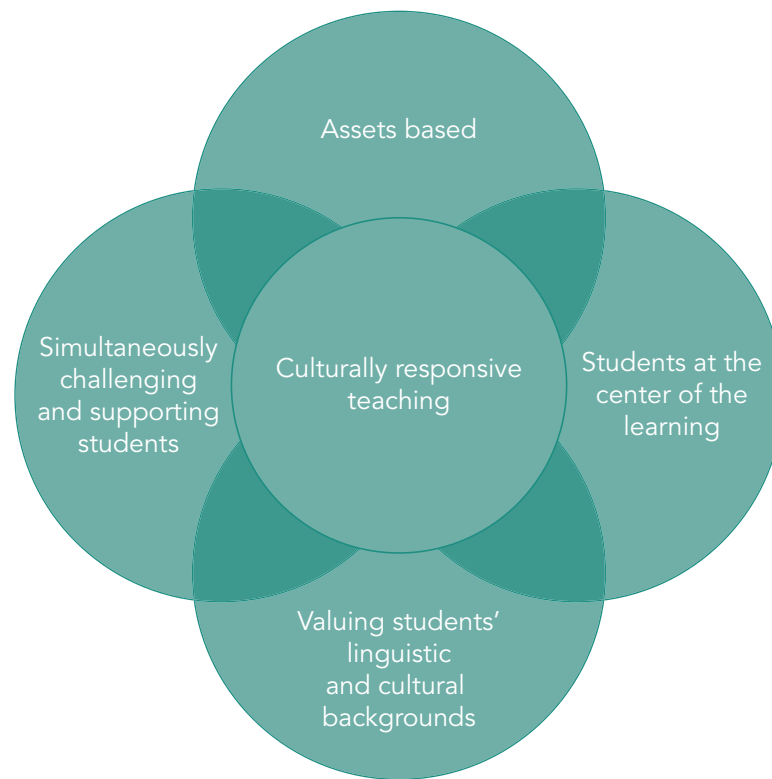
Instead, Nieto (2016) describes culturally responsive pedagogy as a mindset that respects and builds on students’ backgrounds and experiences through the use of materials and specific teaching approaches. Culturally responsive educators strive to learn what makes each student unique in order to appreciate the diverse perspectives and insights they can bring to their classroom. Culturally responsive educators are also able to confront their own biases.

What Are the Guidelines of Culturally Responsive Teaching?

While educators and researchers describe varying characteristics of culturally responsive teaching, we have attempted to synthesize these ideas into four overarching guidelines. As can be seen in Figure 2.5, the guidelines overlap with one another. The guidelines are as follows:

- Guideline 1: Culturally responsive teaching is assets-based.
- Guideline 2: Culturally responsive teaching places students at the center of learning.
- Guideline 3: Culturally responsive teaching values students’ languages, cultures, and backgrounds.
- Guideline 4: Culturally responsive teaching simultaneously challenges and supports students.

We will provide an explanation of each, its relationship to ELs, and some classroom “look-fors” that indicate these criteria are at work in the classroom in the sections that follow.

FIGURE 2.5 The Guidelines of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Guideline 1: Culturally responsive teaching is assets based.

When we consider the obstacles that ELs must surmount in order to acquire a new language while, at the same time, learning academic content, it can be easy to approach our work with ELs from a deficit perspective. A deficit perspective is one in which we focus on ELs' challenges and frame our interactions with them in terms of these challenges. Using a deficit lens, educators tend to view ELs' home language(s) and culture(s) as hindrances to overcome. In addition, they may attribute poor performance or achievement to ELs' linguistic abilities in English, motivation, lack of parental involvement, or other such factors (González, 2005; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). In contrast, an assets-based perspective is one that values students' home languages and cultures and sees them as foundations for future learning (González, 2005; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). Similarly, an assets-based perspective recognizes that parents of ELs are involved in their children's education and support their children in varied and perhaps unrecognized ways (Staehr Fenner, 2014). An additional benefit of using an assets-based perspective is that it provides opportunities to honor students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and incorporate what students already know into their teaching.

In order to envision how an assets-based perspective plays out in the classroom, review the classroom look-fors in Figure 2.6.

FIGURE 2.6 Guideline 1 Classroom Look-Fors

- ✓ Teacher pronounces students' names correctly.
- ✓ Teacher shows interest in ELs' home languages by learning at least a few words or phrases.
- ✓ Teacher incorporates cultural, historic, and linguistic information about the target culture into instruction.
- ✓ Teacher uses instruction of home language cognates to reinforce vocabulary comprehension.
- ✓ Teacher is aware of each student's interests and challenges outside of the classroom.
- ✓ Teacher uses multiple means of communicating with EL families (e.g., translated notes, telephone calls, and use of an interpreter).
- ✓ Teacher puts supports in place to help students overcome obstacles that may get in the way of their learning (e.g., snacks for students who may not have had breakfast, system for catching up on missed work, and written agenda for ELs to follow).

APPLICATION ACTIVITY 2.5

Shifting to an Assets-Based Perspective

Consider the following reflection questions to help you better understand your perspective when working with ELs. For each question, answer *yes*, *sometimes*, or *no*. For any question that you answer with a *sometimes* or a *no*, write down a question or idea that you have about how to shift toward an assets-based perspective in this area.

Reflection Question	Yes	Sometimes	No	Question or Idea for a Shift to an Assets-Based Perspective
1. Do I view students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as a valuable source of knowledge and skills that I can build on in my lessons?				
2. Do I view diverse perspectives as a beneficial resource for all students and look for ways to incorporate these diverse perspectives into my teaching?				

Reflection Question	Yes	Sometimes	No	Question or Idea for a Shift to an Assets-Based Perspective
3. Do I recognize and appreciate that EL families may contribute to their children's educations in varied and sometimes unseen ways?				
4. Do I hold my ELs to the same high standards as other students?				
5. Do I recognize that ELs who are struggling in my class may be doing so because they need additional forms of support to acquire language and content knowledge that they are not currently receiving?				

An assets-based perspective requires that you approach the work you do with ELs with respect and empathy. Respect and empathy will grow when you try to put yourself in the shoes of ELs and their families and imagine what it is like to assimilate into an unfamiliar culture, learn a new language, and figure out a new school system (Staehr Fenner, 2014). As an example of how you can build empathy into your teaching, Saifer et al. (2011) describe a teacher who recognized that one challenge her students faced was missing class or coming to class late because of personal factors. Rather than setting up an uncomfortable or punitive situation for these students in her class that may have increased their likelihood of missing more class, this teacher set up a system so that when a student arrived to class, he or she could jump right in. The day's agenda and class handouts were readily available, and each class had an appointed student who was the go-to person for directions and class notes (p. 33).

Respect and empathy are also needed when you are confronted with a situation where you find yourself using a deficit perspective to understand what happened. For example, if you happen to catch yourself blaming ELs or their families, try to "shake up" your thinking so that you start by assuming the best about the student or the family members involved and consider their perspective, as well as challenges or obstacles that they might be facing. Application Activity 2.6 provides you with an opportunity to think about how you might reframe a deficit perspective into actions that come from a place of respect and empathy for ELs and their families.

APPLICATION ACTIVITY 2.6

Assets-Based Perspective Scenarios

We present three scenarios in Figure 2.7.

1. Read the first scenario. Also, read the second and third columns, which present another way of understanding the scenario.
2. For the second and third scenarios, complete the second two columns yourself. First, approach the ELs and their families in each scenario from a respectful and empathetic perspective, and then determine what steps the teacher(s) in the scenarios might take to change his or her deficit perspective.
3. In the final row, write a scenario that is relevant to your context.

FIGURE 2.7 Assets-Based Perspective Scenarios

Scenario	Respectful and empathetic perspective	Steps you might take to support ELs and their families
The members of an elementary school parent teacher association (PTA) are complaining that despite there being a significant number of ELs in the school, none of the EL parents attend the PTA meetings. They feel that families of ELs are not interested in supporting the school.	There are many reasons why the families of ELs may not be involved in the PTA. For starters, EL families may come from countries where parent associations do not exist or information about the PTA meeting may not be clearly shared with families in a language they can understand. Additionally, family members may have such constraints as having to work, not having childcare, or not having transportation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure meeting information is clear and delivered in families' home languages. • Reach out to families and explain what the PTA does and how their participation would benefit the group. • Offer childcare during PTA meetings. • Offer support with transportation if needed.
A sixth-grade science teacher has students work in groups on various assignments. He has three ELs in his class who are at a low-to-intermediate proficiency level, and he has tried to group them with ELs at higher proficiency levels. However, he finds that when they are grouped together, they like to speak Spanish. He feels uncomfortable because he doesn't know what they are saying, and he is worried that they are off task or talking about him.		

Scenario	Respectful and empathetic perspective	Steps you might take to support ELs and their families
<p>During parent–teacher conference time, four elementary teachers are eating lunch together. They begin to complain about how many of the parents of their ELs show up late for conferences, attend the conference with a younger child in tow, and/or do not actively participate in the conference. They decide they will share their frustrations with the ESOL teacher.</p>		
<p>Scenario from my context:</p>		

Guideline 2: Culturally responsive teaching places students at the center of the learning.

Student-centered learning is not new in the field of education, and there are a variety of approaches that fit within this model (e.g., collaborative learning, inquiry-based learning, or project-based learning). Student-centered learning can be defined as an instructional approach in which the students in the classroom shape the content, instructional activities, materials, assessment, and/or pace of the learning. Student-centered learning also focuses on the idea that students are provided with opportunities to learn from one another rather than solely from the teacher.

In order to incorporate student-centered learning practices in your classroom, review the classroom look-fors in Figure 2.8.

One step toward student-centered learning is making sure that the learning goals are explained in student-friendly language so that students can participate in setting goals for their learning and assessing their learning (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2004). For ELs, this could be an unfamiliar experience. Deconstructing the standards that you are working

FIGURE 2.8 Guideline 2 Classroom Look-Fors

- ✓ Student-friendly learning objectives (content and language) are posted in the classroom.
- ✓ ELs are provided clear visual and oral instructions for activities.
- ✓ All new activities are modeled for ELs.
- ✓ ELs are given choice in their learning.
- ✓ ELs are given opportunities to speak and write about their lives and people and events that are important to them.
- ✓ ELs are involved in goal setting and assessment through the use of student goal sheets, checklists, peer-editing activities, and teacher–student or student–student conferencing.
- ✓ EL student work is displayed in the classroom.
- ✓ Lessons include activities that foster relationship building (e.g., think-pair-share discussions and collaborative tasks).
- ✓ Lessons include intentional groupings of students to support student learning and to allow for grouping that considers language backgrounds.
- ✓ Group work is intentionally structured so that all students have specific roles or ways to meaningfully contribute.

How might you adapt Figure 2.10 for your own context?

on in order to present them in student-friendly terms can be a challenge. Figure 2.9 provides an example of how to rephrase content standards so as to present them in terms of what students will be able to do. This is an example of a content objective, but you can use the same approach for developing student-friendly language objectives.

Figure 2.10 is a document that you could use for helping students set goals for their learning.

FIGURE 2.9 Example of Student-Friendly Learning Objectives

- Common Core State Standard:** RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- Student content objective:** I will be able to answer questions about the text by using information that is stated in the text (explicit information) and by drawing inferences from the text (coming up with answers that are not stated or written in the text).

Source: August, D., Staehr Fenner, D., Snyder, S., & Pook, D. (2014, June). *Secondary curricular units for New York City Department of Education*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, Center for English Language Learners. Reprinted with permission of American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/68300610-4F11-433E-8D0C-6DE718752989/0/SecondaryUnits.pdf>

FIGURE 2.10 Student Goal Setting for an Academic Conversation

Name _____ Date _____

During today's discussion, I want to focus on the following:

_____ Using appropriate eye contact and body language for a discussion

_____ Making connections between my ideas and what someone else said

_____ Using evidence from the text to support my answer

_____ Using this unit's academic vocabulary when speaking

Something that I might need to help me accomplish this goal is _____

(e.g., sentence frames, a word bank of unit vocabulary, or a reminder from the teacher).

Student-Centered Classroom Environments

There are also several ways to create an environment that is student centered. Saifer et al. (2011) make the following recommendations:

- Display pictures of your students engaged in learning activities.
- Display student work (including examples of bilingual work).
- Post student quotes.
- Display signs in other languages, or label classroom objectives in students' home languages.
- Have a multicultural classroom library, including supporting resources in students' home languages.

Guideline 3: Culturally responsive teaching values students' languages, cultures, and backgrounds.

The third guideline focuses on ways that teaching and learning can give value to students' home language, cultures, and experiences. Figure 2.11 offers some suggestions for what you would expect to see in a culturally responsive classroom. The "Additional Resources" section of this chapter on pages 57–58 provides some recommended resources for materials and lesson ideas.

FIGURE 2.11 Guideline 3 Classroom Look-Fors

- ✓ Lessons include multicultural materials and resources.
- ✓ Lessons and units include perspectives of individuals that come from ELs' home cultures (e.g., literature written by non-U.S. American authors).
- ✓ Lessons include activities that draw on ELs' backgrounds and experiences.
- ✓ Lessons include opportunities for ELs to use bilingual resources (e.g., dictionaries, books, or glossaries) and home languages.
- ✓ EL families and communities are included in the learning (e.g., community members are invited to speak in class).

APPLICATION ACTIVITY 2.7

Mr. Washburn's Classroom

Read the scenario that follows, and consider how Mr. Washburn might make his unit on immigration more culturally responsive to the ELs whom he is teaching. Answer the discussion questions that follow.

Scenario: *Mr. Washburn is a middle school social studies teacher at an urban middle school with a large population of ELs from Mexico and Central America. He has seven ELs in one of his social studies classes. Three of the ELs have been in the country for less than a year. The other ELs have been in the U.S. for two to six years. Mr. Washburn is currently teaching a unit on U.S. immigration, focusing on the experiences of immigrants that came to the United States in the early 1900s. As part of this unit, students will take a virtual tour of Ellis Island, read excerpts from *Island of Hope: The Story of Ellis Island and the Journey to America* (Sandler, 2004), and give an oral report on one aspect of the immigrant experience during this time (e.g., travel to the United States or life in the tenements).*

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways is the unit plan relevant to the lives of the students in the class? In what ways could the unit be made more relevant to their lives?
2. What steps could the teacher take to build on the backgrounds and experiences of the ELs in the class?
3. What additional recommendations do you have for activities that would strengthen students' engagement with the unit and bring in diverse perspectives?

As you probably concluded, a unit on immigration is most likely very relevant to the lives of ELs. However, rather than focusing only on immigration in the early 1900s, the teacher could also discuss current immigration. There are many young adult novels that address issues of immigration (e.g., *Day of the Pelican* [Paterson, 2010], *Inside Out & Back Again* [Lai, 2013], *How Many Days to America?* [Bunting, 1990], *Star in the Forest* [Resau, 2012], and *Shooting Kabul* [Senzai, 2011]). Students could also read and discuss editorials about current immigration from a social justice lens. They could make connections between why immigrants came to the United States in the early 1900s and why they come now. There are many great resources for teaching about immigration that support a multicultural perspective on the topic, such as *Teaching Tolerance's* "The Human Face of Immigration" (Costello, 2011). You can also find text sets on a particular topic, such as immigration, that offer resources at varied reading levels. As you plan lessons, even on those topics that may seem far removed from the lives of the ELs you work with, look for opportunities to make meaningful connections to their own experiences.

What About Home Language Use?

A common misconception in regard to the teaching of ELs is that they should be discouraged from speaking their home language with their families and peers and that home language use should not be incorporated into instruction. However, research indicates that ELs can draw from their home language when acquiring knowledge and skills in English (Dressler, 2006). Furthermore, instruction that incorporates and builds on ELs' home language will support them in developing literacy in English (August, Branum-Martin, Cardenas-Hagan, & Francis, 2009; Carlo et al., 2004; Liang, Peterson, & Graves, 2005; Restrepo et al., 2010). In addition, by providing ELs opportunities to use their home language, you are validating their cultural and linguistic background and recognizing the benefits of being multilingual.

There are many different ways to incorporate home language into instruction, even if you do not speak students' home languages. One excellent way to support home language development is to use home language resources. School librarians are often wonderful resources for finding translated or home language texts to support the content you are working on (e.g., a translated copy of a graphic novel about Paul Revere). You can also provide students with opportunities to do bilingual work on their assignments (e.g., use a bilingual glossary, write a story in both English and their home language, or have them interview a family or community member in their home language). When providing students opportunities to work in their home language or use home language resources, it is essential that you have a clear understanding of their literacy skills in that language.

Students who do not have strong home language literacy skills may not benefit from such written resources, and they might also be embarrassed if they do not feel comfortable reading and writing in their home language.

Another strategy for supporting home language development is intentionally grouping students to allow opportunities for them to use their home language during group work (as appropriate). It is understandable that if you don't speak the home language, you may be uncomfortable with this strategy because you don't know what is being discussed in the group. However, if you set up concrete tasks for the group, you will be able to identify whether or not students are engaged in the activity. You can also have students record their discussions and seek support from a colleague who speaks the home language to interpret the conversation for you.

Guideline 4: Culturally responsive teaching simultaneously challenges and supports students.

This final guideline is based on the importance of having high expectations for the ELs in your classes while at the same time giving them the support that they need to achieve. ELs should have access to the same grade-level content and texts as their non-EL peers, but they should be given sufficient instructional support for this work.

This guideline is also framed around the idea that within our society, certain cultural groups have privileges that are not granted to individuals outside these groups. Culturally responsive teachers develop lessons that include the history and experiences of diverse groups and explicit instruction about structures that reinforce power, privilege, and discriminatory practices in society. In addition, culturally responsive teaching provides opportunities for students and educators to think critically about institutionalized inequity, how inequity and injustice impact their lives, and steps needed to address this inequity (National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems, 2008).

Figure 2.12 offers some suggestions for how to apply this guideline in your classroom.

An example of what Guideline 4 might look like in practice is a unit that is taught at a diverse urban high school in California. The ninth-grade English teachers at the Nelson Mandela Academy have developed a unit called "Linguistic Biographies" in which students reflect on their own experiences of using language in different contexts and engage in collaborative academic tasks designed to foster students' appreciation for linguistic diversity and strategies for responding to negative comments about their home language(s) and/or dialects (California Department of Education, 2015). During this unit, students take part in a variety of collaborative activities, including reflecting on their own multilingual or multidialectal experiences, analyzing poetry and contemporary music to understand the connections

FIGURE 2.12 Guideline 4 Classroom Look-Fors

- ✓ ELs are taught grade-level content and texts. Instructional texts include a balance of grade-level texts and texts at students' reading levels.
- ✓ Instruction and materials are appropriately scaffolded so ELs are able to access and engage with grade-level content and texts.³
- ✓ The classroom contains visual supports for ELs (e.g., word wall with visual and/or home language translations).
- ✓ Instruction includes regular, structured small-group and pair work.
- ✓ Instruction includes activities that foster critical thinking and reflection (e.g., open-ended discussion prompts and student monitoring of their learning).
- ✓ Instruction includes activities that require students to make connections with their prior learning.
- ✓ Instruction includes activities that require students to consider alternative ways of understanding information and are open to diverse perspectives (e.g., analyzing the change that some states have made from celebrating Columbus Day to celebrating Indigenous People's Day).

between language choices and cultural values and identity, and producing writing and multimedia pieces that examine the connection between language, culture, and society.

What Is the Role of Collaboration in Developing a Culturally Responsive Classroom?

Collaboration is at the heart of a culturally responsive classroom. The task of learning more about the cultures of others while, at the same time, reflecting on your own culture requires risk-taking, openness, flexibility, and occasional feelings of discomfort. There will be times that you will make mistakes, and there will be times that you may feel angry or frustrated. However, the relationships that you build and the knowledge that you gain can be incredibly rewarding. We make the following recommendations for collaboration with colleagues and EL families.

- Collaborate with colleagues to learn more about the backgrounds, experiences, and cultures of ELs and their families. You can share what you know about specific instructional strategies that have worked well with certain students and strategies for building on students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. You can also share ways that you have for communicating with and engaging EL families. ESOL teachers and classroom teachers may want to participate in home visits together.

3. For more on scaffolded instruction strategies, see Chapter 3.

- Collaborate with colleagues to share resources. Building a multicultural library and/or developing online file sharing can be effective ways to support culturally responsive teaching. A multicultural library can include resources related to particular themes (e.g., peace building or civil rights movement), books written by authors from a variety of cultures, books that share perspectives that may be traditionally overlooked, bilingual books, and more. Your school librarian might be an excellent person to collaborate with on this work. Online file sharing can be a way to share resources or online tools connected to a particular unit or theme. It can also be a way to share information about student backgrounds, goals, and achievement.
- Collaborate with families of ELs to support ELs' engagement and achievement. School programs that foster family involvement in student learning at home and in school activities result in greater student achievement and improved student attitudes about school (Mexican American Legal Defense Fund and National Education Association, 2010). In order to build parental engagement, you should begin by looking for effective and varied ways to communicate with families (e.g., using an interpreter, same home language phone chain, or a communication tool such as ClassDojo that translates text messages into multiple languages). Be flexible about the times you are available to meet with families, and look for ways your school can address potential challenges to parent participation at school events (e.g., transportation, childcare, language barriers, work, and family obligations) (Staehr Fenner, 2014). In addition, look for opportunities to invite families to volunteer in the classroom to share their culture and language and also to help build their familiarity and level of comfort with the school.

What Is the Role of Equity, Advocacy, and Leadership in Developing a Culturally Responsive Classroom?

Having a culturally responsive classroom that builds on the strengths of your students, encourages the sharing of diverse perspectives and experiences, and ultimately supports each EL in acquiring language proficiency and mastering content knowledge is the very definition of equity and advocacy for ELs. However, a climate of cultural awareness and inclusiveness is something that must be cultivated not only in your classroom but throughout the entire school. If your school currently does not offer a welcoming environment for ELs and their families or if you feel interactions with ELs are often framed from a deficit perspective, you can take on a leadership role in order to advocate for these students. We suggest that you prioritize an area you have

the greatest opportunity to make an impact in, rather than focusing on an area in which there is little chance for change. Then, find an ally or two who can help you promote an assets-based perspective of ELs. Next, plan out some steps you will take to make positive changes and advocate for equity for ELs.

APPLICATION ACTIVITY 2.8

Ms. Monahan's Classroom

Read the scenario, and answer the discussion questions that follow.

Scenario: Ms. Monahan is an ESOL teacher at a suburban high school with a growing number of ELs. She felt that the school administration, in general, and the assistant principal, Mr. Sheridan, in particular, did not have a strong understanding of the needs of the ELs in the school or respect for these students and their families. At one point, when advocating for more professional development for the teachers at the school working with ELs, Mr. Sheridan commented to her that the students didn't seem to be making much progress and that he found them hard to understand. Ms. Monahan decided to invite Mr. Sheridan into her class as a guest. She had her students prepare short presentations on some of their favorite things about the high school (e.g., particular classes, friendships they had, and school activities), and she also encouraged them to speak about some of the challenges that they had (e.g., navigating the lunch room, understanding some of their teachers, and making new friends). Ms. Monahan also asked Mr. Sheridan to prepare some questions that he could ask the students in order to learn more about their interests, goals, and challenges.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think was Ms. Monahan's goal in inviting the assistant principal into her classroom?
2. What else might Ms. Monahan do to advocate for the ELs in her school?

This scenario and the teacher's response demonstrate the need for teachers to take a lead in advocating for better understanding of ELs at all levels within the school. In some situations, complex planning and collaboration will be necessary.⁴

4. In *Advocating for English Learners: A Guide for Educators* (2014), Staehr Fenner provides useful tools and ideas for advocating for ELs in your context.

Next Steps

We have provided a lot of information in this chapter, and we will explore many of these topics in greater depth throughout the remaining chapters of the book. However, in order to start down the path of culturally responsive teaching, use the template in Figure 2.13 to reflect on a unit that you will be teaching in the upcoming month. As you think about the unit, consider the four guidelines that we have outlined in this chapter, and decide on one strategy for each guideline that you would like to try out in your classroom. You can also think about what support you may need to help you incorporate these strategies into your teaching (e.g., knowledge about ELs or bilingual resources) and who might be able to help you (e.g., ESOL teacher or school librarian).

FIGURE 2.13 Culturally Responsive Teaching Goal-Setting Template

Guidelines	To Incorporate This Guideline, I Will . . .
1. Culturally responsive teaching is assets based.	
2. Culturally responsive teaching places students at the center of the learning.	
3. Culturally responsive teaching values students' languages, cultures, and backgrounds.	
4. Culturally responsive teaching simultaneously challenges and supports students.	
Some support I may need:	
Possible resources:	

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have provided you with an opportunity to reflect on your own culture and how it impacts your beliefs about teaching and learning. We have also provided you with some insight into how ELs who come from different cultural backgrounds may have varying beliefs about and approaches to education. Finally, we presented four guidelines for culturally responsive teaching, along with some tools for using these

guidelines in your classroom. In the next chapter, we will provide some strategies for scaffolding instruction to recognize the strengths and meet the needs of ELs of varying proficiency levels. Chapter 3 correlates directly with Guideline 4: Culturally responsive teaching simultaneously challenges and supports students.

Reflection Questions

1. What new understandings do you have about how your own culture shapes who you are as a teacher?
2. What are two ideas that you have for drawing on students' cultural backgrounds and experiences to make connections to content in your classroom?

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