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Culturally and Linguistically

Responsive Teaching and Learning

**Classroom
Practices
for
Student
Success**

Sharroky Hollie

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Understanding Mindset

Part 1

The Journey to Responsiveness

Chapter 1



Anticipation Guide

What do you think of when you encounter the term *culturally responsive teaching*? Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the concept?

- _____ Culturally responsive teaching is meant to help with race relations among educators and students.
- _____ All students can achieve highly when given the opportunity to learn.
- _____ Racial identity and cultural identity are synonymous.
- _____ Nonstandard English is a simplified version of Standard English.
- _____ Socioeconomic status is the most critical factor in student success.



Your Journey to Responsiveness

Where are you in your journey to responsiveness? I need you to answer this question by the end of the chapter because where you are in your journey will determine how receptive you are to the rest of the chapters in the book. Cultural responsiveness, no matter how you are viewing it now, begins with you and where you are in your heart and mind. Before we begin what will be, in effect, a reflective process, I want to make sure that you recognize that you are beginning or have been involved in an ongoing progression to better serve all your students in a way that validates and affirms who they are culturally and linguistically. The recognition of your process and knowing where you are in it will keep you centered and focused on the overall goal: better academic outcomes for all students and a deeper understanding of their cultural selves in the context of academia (school culture) and mainstream culture. There is a caution, however. You must be certain, confident, and capable on this journey because there will be hurdles, challenges, pitfalls, and bumps along the way—sometimes in the form of negativity, or what I call *resistance*, and sometimes in the form of struggles, which are expected and can be positive.

What is the journey to responsiveness? It involves two initial phases followed by a landing phase. Phase one is courageously conversing about race when necessary. Note the word *courageously*. This is not the conversation with your neighbor, with your family, or the conversation you had on November 9, 2016, the day after a historic presidential election. The conversation I am referring to is different than those because it requires four

parts. Glenn Singleton describes these parts in his concept of *Courageous Conversations* (2015). The four parts are:

1. You had the opportunity to speak your truth. You were able to get things off your mind, off your chest.
2. You listened to someone else with an open mind.
3. The conversation was uncomfortable. You felt a healthy tension, anxiousness.
4. The conversation was real talk, adult language, no minced words; all cards were put on the table.

If you have had ongoing courageous conversations about race, when necessary, that included these four parts, then you are well on your way to responsiveness. Think. When was the last time that you had a courageous conversation about race?

Next, you recognized that there was more to this journey than conversation and consideration about race. While discussing race is inescapable in the context of the United States, there is a glass ceiling with the conversation. At some point, there is no place to go with it. Actions have to be taken, steps have to be made toward justice, fairness, and success for your students. In your journey, you recognized this and began to advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves. You became a voice for the voiceless or the unheard. You spoke up in a meeting about unfairness. You risked your position by fighting for a policy, procedure, or practice that was to the benefit of those who have not traditionally benefitted from schooling in the United States. The second phase is *advocacy*. Have you been an advocate recently? For whom? In what ways? After advocating, you realized that there is more to this journey.

The *landing phase* of the journey causes you to look up at the sky and wonder about the possibilities. And if it is a clear evening, with stars illuminating the sky, then you will see “Planet Responsiveness,” your landing spot for the journey. It is there— or here, where I am—that you will spend the rest of your time exploring “cultures.” The cultures referred to are not based on race, nor ethnicity alone. The cultures on Planet Responsiveness speak to who we are, wholly related to our identities and how they are manifested in the context of institutions such as schools. If you are on Planet Responsiveness, then you are learning about your students culturally and linguistically every day. You are making efforts to engage them in ways that first validate and affirm, and then build and bridge. This is achieved in how you talk to your students, how you build rapport and relationships with them, and how you teach them.

This chapter and those that follow are going to teach you how to move through the three phases. The concepts and activities will work most effectively and efficiently once you land on Planet Responsiveness. I am waiting for you, whether you are here already or on your way. With the journey to responsiveness comes changes and shifts in your mindset, which are recognitions of your dispositions, perspectives, biases, prejudices, ignorance, misunderstandings, and misgivings about the cultures and languages of others. The rest of the chapter is organized around what it takes to change your attitude about culture and language.

Changes in Mindset

The journey to responsiveness happens in two ways: a change in mindset and a change in skillset. The focus of this first chapter is the change in mindset. As the initial step to changing the instructional dynamic in the classroom and the overall school climate, educators have to see their students' cultural and linguistic behaviors differently. A change in mindset is rooted in four areas, which form the organization of this chapter. These areas are:

1. Speaking a common language—CLR terminology
2. Defining CLR technically and conceptually—VABB
3. Listening to your deficit monitor
4. Identifying the beneficiaries of responsiveness

Phases in the Journey to Responsiveness

Phase 1—Converse: Participate in courageous conversations about race.

Phase 2—Advocate: Become an advocate for constructive change.

Phase 3—Explore: Appreciate the possibilities for change and strive to fulfill them.

What's in a Name? Everything!

Unfortunately, the term *culturally responsive teaching* has become a cliché, buried in the grave of educational terms that are cast about like ghosts in books, state mandates, district initiatives, and conference themes. When a term in education becomes clichéd, it becomes meaningless; it loses its power. Over the years, I have seen a steady increase in educators saying they are culturally responsive or that culturally responsive teaching is a part of their goals. Long ago, I received an email from an educator in the Midwest who said that her superintendent had now branded the district “culturally responsive.” However, she was not sure what that meant and needed to know immediately—before the ubiquitous one-day mandated district professional development program. Throughout my home state of California, many districts want to be culturally responsive, or at least they think they do. In reality, what they are seeking is how to address racial issues under the cover of *culturally responsive teaching*. And why not? The term sounds appropriate and informative, seems to address the sensitive issues of race in a nonthreatening way, and serves a purpose in situations where the achievement gap persists and where negative attitudes about race, culture, and language remain stubbornly in place. But turning the meaning of culturally responsive teaching into a quick fix for race relations, diversity issues, and achievement-gap woes is a fleeting solution. The authenticity and relevance of the term is steeped in transforming instructional practices to make the difference for improving relationships between students and educators and increasing student achievement. This is my point: what you label actions to address sensitive issues must have meaning backed by tangible outcomes. There must be an investment in cultural and linguistic responsiveness like any other program, approach, or initiative.

Speaking a Common Language

Being culturally and linguistically responsive begins with understanding its meaning and having consensus about how to name it. My term, *culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning (CLR)*, speaks to its comprehensiveness and complexity. There is an in-depth focus on culture and language. This focus is a benefit to both teachers and learners. The use of the word *responsive* is strategic and purposeful because it forces a thought process beyond such common monikers as relevance, proficiency, or competency. To be responsive, educators must be willing to validate and affirm students through instruction, which leads to the pedagogical skillset (the topic of [Chapter 2](#)). Let's begin by speaking a common language.

Multiple names and definitions have been given to culturally responsive teaching over the past 50 years. These variations include, among others, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally compatible teaching, culturally relevant teaching, culturally connected teaching, culturally responsive learning, culturally matched teaching, cultural proficiency, cultural competency, and culturally appropriate teaching (Gay 2000). Within the past five years, Paris and Alim have introduced another term, *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (2014).

Defining

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Gloria Ladson-Billings defines *culturally responsive teaching (CRT)* as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical references to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes” (1994, 13).

Geneva Gay defines *culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP)* as “the use of 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” (2000, 31).

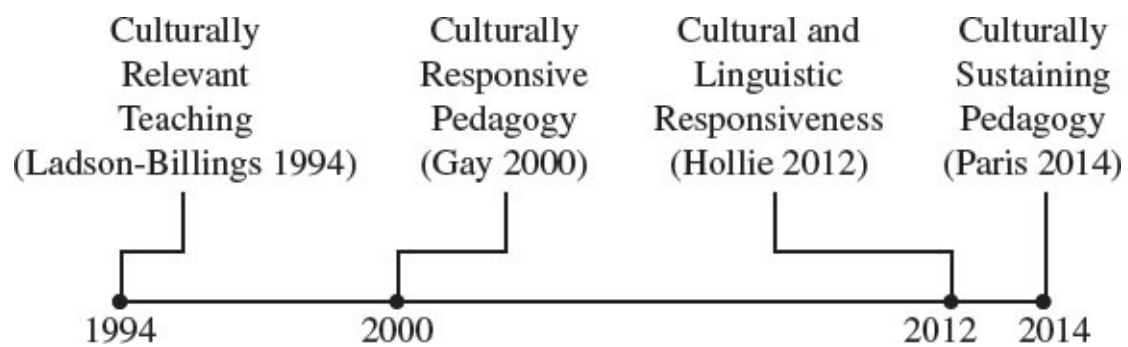
Sharroky Hollie defines *cultural and linguistic responsiveness (CLR)* as “the validation and affirmation of the home (indigenous) culture and home language for the purposes of building and bridging the student to success in the culture of academia and mainstream society” (2012, 23).

Django Paris and H. Samy Alim explain *culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP)* as having “as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. CSP seeks to perpetuate and foster—to *sustain*—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change. CSP, then, links a focus on sustaining pluralism through education to challenges of social justice and change in ways that previous iterations of asset pedagogies did not” (2014, 14).

While CSP advances the theory of culturally relevant teaching, the multiple definitions have contributed to its cliched use that has diluted its meaning. Furthermore, some superficial interpretations have led to obscure attempts at implementation in districts (focused on professional development), schools (focused on curriculum initiatives), and classrooms (focused on instructional strategies). My proposal is that you explicitly look at cultural relevancy as theory on a continuum and know where you fall philosophically. As a result, you will know better where you stand, which will increase your chances of being culturally responsive. [Figure 1.1](#) provides a continuum to consider. Of course, this consideration requires you to deeply study the various viewpoints of what makes each one different in the progression. Think of the theory as a hamburger and the different names for it as different types of hamburgers. When it comes to hamburgers, think of the types you prefer and the accompaniments of each. In order to be culturally responsive, you need to know what type of burger you are eating. Just don't go for the bun and meat with lettuce and mayo. In others words, know your brand.

The continuum in [Figure 1.1](#) illustrates the evolution of culturally relevant theory through the years 1994–2014.

Fig. 1.1 Continuum of Culturally Relevant Theory



Almost any innovation that has had staying power in education and is still in use today has maintained its terminology and meaningfulness. The term for that innovation will not have changed, although its interpretation may have evolved in a consistent way. An example that comes to mind is *cooperative learning*, a concept put forth in the late 1960s (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec 1994; Kagan and Kagan 2009). The term *cooperative learning* has remained intact for almost four decades and has furthermore evolved to include the concept of *collaborative learning*. When most educators encounter the term *cooperative learning*, there is consensus on its meaning. My point is that cooperative learning has had staying power because it has not been subjected to multiple terms and interpretations, as is the case with culturally responsive teaching.

I believe that clarity can sometimes be more important than agreement. Being clear on what is meant by culturally and linguistically responsive teaching is certainly one of those cases. In training over 100,000 educators, observing in over 2,000 classrooms, and speaking to hundreds of audiences across the country, I have found that most teachers and administrators appreciate the focus on clarity as opposed to forcing agreement or buy-in.

Pause to Ponder

What is your term for cultural relevancy? Why did you choose that term? In which situations have you used the term? In those situations, was there consistency in the use of terms and their meanings? Do you think it is necessary for individuals to use the same terms and definitions?

For the purposes of my work and this book in particular, I advocate a singular use of the concept and terminology. If an educator desires to be culturally and linguistically responsive or a school is looking to implement the approach, I recommend that all stakeholders agree upon one term and one meaning—preferably the one used in this book. As a result of the work in which I have been immersed since 2000, I have adopted the term *cultural and linguistic responsiveness (CLR)* for three reasons:

1. I have found that many so-called followers of culturally responsive teaching are actually most interested in *racially* responsive teaching. There is a tendency to be more focused on racial identity rather than the myriad cultural identities in our

collective diversity. My focus on culture, language, gender, class, and religion is anthropologically based, not race based. Conflating culture and race is a common misinterpretation among some individuals who work with diverse groups of students. CLR makes clear the distinction and fosters understanding of the need to avoid such identity confusion.

2. I use CLR in order to emphasize the language aspect of culture. I believe that there is nothing more cultural about us as humans than the use of our home language. Linguistic identity is a crucial aspect of who we are. By itself, the term *culture* subsumes language; consequently, linguistic identity is obscured. By including “linguistic” in the term CLR, the intentionality of the language focus is demonstrated as equal to what we typically consider as culture. In short, we are what we speak, and to a large extent, our language is a representation of our heritage, including family, community, and history.
3. CLR is a pedagogy. Pedagogy is a five-star word frequently thrown around in academic circles with the result that some people consider the term to be jargon. I consider pedagogy to be a powerful term in its meaning and its functionality in CLR. I define *pedagogy* as the “how” and “why” of teaching, the strategic use of methods, and the rationale behind why instructional decisions are made. Pedagogy is usually the most often missed facet of culturally responsive teaching. Without the pedagogy, there is only theory on how to respond to students’ cultural and linguistic needs, and theory alone does not adequately serve teachers and students.

To sum up, what a concept is called matters. In society, how we label something speaks to what it means to us symbolically. *Cultural and linguistic responsiveness* is the concept that is developed in this book.

Defining CLR Technically and Conceptually: VABB

Most proponents of culturally relevant teaching will point to *The Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson-Billings’s (1994) groundbreaking book, as the star in the culturally responsive universe. This work has defined what many have come to know about the approach, and her description of six culturally relevant teachers is a must-read for those interested in being culturally responsive. She provides a classic definition of *culturally responsive teaching*: “A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes” (1994, 13). Teachers practicing culturally relevant teaching know how to support student learning by consciously creating social interactions that help them meet the criteria of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. In addition to the work of Ladson-Billings, advanced students of culturally responsive teaching will point to the contributions of Ramírez and Castaneda (1974). Many cite this reference as the earliest introduction of culturally responsive teaching, showing that the concept itself goes back many years. While Ramírez and Castañeda may have introduced culturally responsive teaching to the research, Ladson-Billings put it on the national map.

Geneva Gay’s text, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2000), is by most accounts the second most influential work on culturally responsive

teaching. She added pedagogy to the concept and became the leader in the second wave of books and articles that would build upon Ladson-Billings's work. She defines culturally responsive pedagogy as "the use of 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" (Gay 2000, 31). This pedagogy teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. In addition to the focus on pedagogy, Gay provides positive achievement data supporting the work from districts and schools across the nation. This addition of results data was important to establish the credibility of culturally responsive teaching, which had been an easy target for critics of the approach. Unfortunately, some criticism can still be found today. Goodwin (2011) cites that there is no research that supports culturally responsive teaching correlated to student achievement. But this statement is based on research from the 1970s and does not account for the evolution of the theory since that time, not to mention any recent research. Other researchers who have made important contributions to the literature of culturally responsive teaching include Delpit and Dowdy (2002), Hollins (2008), Irvine (1991), and Villegas and Lucas (2007). These researchers agree on a key element of culturally responsive teaching: it responds to students' needs by taking into account cultural and linguistic factors in their worlds.

This view of CLR from the research perspective is central to the content of this book as well as to the work I do with educators around the country. Therefore, *technically*, cultural and linguistic responsiveness means the *validation and affirmation* of indigenous (home) culture and language for the purpose of *building and bridging* the students to success in the culture of academia and in mainstream society. *Conceptually*, CLR is going to where the students are culturally and linguistically, for the aim of bringing them where they need to be academically. *Metaphorically*, CLR is the opposite of the sink-or-swim approach to teaching and learning in traditional schools. CLR means that teachers jump into the pool with the learners, guide them with appropriate instruction, scaffold as necessary, and provide for independence when they are ready. Validation, affirmation, building, and bridging is known as *VABB*. I want you *VABBing* your students. I want you to be *VABBulous* in all that you do with your students. Your teaching should be *VABBilicious*. I think that you get the point. *VABB* is CLR.

Validation

Validation is the intentional and purposeful legitimization of the home culture and language of the student. Such validation has been traditionally delegitimized by historical institutional and structural racism, stereotypes, and generalizations primarily carried forth through mainstream media. In the institution of schools, students are invalidated when they are told over and over that they are rude, insubordinate, defiant, disrespectful, disruptive, unmotivated, and lazy. These labels over time chip away at students' cultural and linguistic value in the context of school. To validate is to provide a counter narrative to students, letting them know in explicit terms that they are not those labels but that they are culturally and linguistically misunderstood.

Affirmation

Affirmation is the intentional and purposeful effort to reverse the negative stereotypes, images, and representations of marginalized cultures and languages promoted by corporate

mainstream media, including music, film, and television. The messages are often subtle and play out through the instructional materials, textbooks, and how the Internet is used in schools. To affirm requires intentionally providing images, texts, and narratives that give students alternate perspectives and the tools to critically analyze media and materials as consumers.

Building

Building is understanding and recognizing the cultural and linguistic behaviors of students and using those behaviors to foster rapport and relationships with the students. In other words, you are building stock with your students, making an investment.

Bridging

Bridging is providing the academic and social skills that students will need to have success beyond your classroom. If building is the investment, then bridging is the return. Bridging is evident when your students demonstrate that they are able to successfully navigate school and mainstream culture.

This definition of CLR is meant to be broad, covering a range of cultural identities and languages. It centers on ethnic identity in the cultural context and on nonstandard languages in the linguistic context because they are the core of who we are in terms of childhoods and upbringing, our families. But in no way is the definition exclusive to any one group. Indeed, CLR is a universal concept. Cultural responsiveness is for everyone. Later in the chapter, I distinguish the different identities that comprise who we are as humans and the cultures that come with those identities. We explore why it is necessary to validate and affirm all that your students are, culturally and linguistically. Before going there, though, I need you to reflect. Given the positive intent of VABBing, why would it be so difficult to do? Given that hardly anyone would argue against the idea of VABBing, why don't our schools VABB on general principle? The next section is the second step in changing your mindset: knowing your biases.

Pause to Ponder

What could prevent you from VABBing a student or a colleague?

Listening to Your Deficit Monitor

What can block you from VABBing your students, colleagues, or even family and friends are your hidden biases. Banaji and Greenwald (2013) teach us that these hidden biases are bits of knowledge about social groups that, once lodged in our minds, can influence our behavior toward members of particular social groups, but we remain oblivious to their influence. As humans, we all have "first thoughts" that are based on prejudices, ignorance, misperceptions, or misinterpretations. These first thoughts keep you from VABBing because they ask, *Why would I validate and affirm a behavior that I view as negative or bad?* In order to VABB, you must be aware of your first thoughts; you have to always listen to your deficit monitor but with the promise that these first thoughts will

not be your last thoughts.

Your *deficit monitor* is that internal signal that warns you when you are looking at students' behaviors solely as negative, as lacking, or as liabilities, without consideration that they might be culturally or linguistically based and, therefore, assets. Those who practice responsiveness as a way of being constantly ask reflectively, *What will prevent me from validating and affirming a student culturally and linguistically?* This reflection keeps us honest about our potential for bias, prejudice, misinformation, and ignorance. We have to be omni-aware of our implicit biased thinking so that we can combat it with the cultural lens of validation and affirmation. "Every man has reminiscences which he would not tell to everyone but only to his friends. He has other matters in his mind which he would not reveal even to his friends, but only to himself, and that in secret. But there are other things which a man is afraid to tell even to himself, and every decent man has a number of such things stored away in his mind" (Banaji and Greenwald 2013, 24). If we stay stuck in the deficit lens, then we are unlikely to validate and affirm. This can affect our instructional practices and the school climate and organizational issues related to equity and institutional racism. Being attuned to your deficit monitor is the key to cultural responsiveness in the classroom. It highlights the path to teaching in a way that validates and affirms.

Eliminating the Deficit Perspective

When it comes to consideration of the cultures and languages of underserved students, many educators' beliefs, attitudes, and mindsets are deficit oriented. In essence, this means that the students are blamed for their failures and are seen as the problem. The students are myopically viewed as lacking *something*. The view of an educator with a deficit mindset is reflected in such observations as these:

- If we had better students, then we would have better schools.
- Our scores were good until *they* started coming here.
- Everyone in our school seems to be doing well except for *those* kids.
- What is *wrong* with them?

Culturally and linguistically, underserved students are all too frequently seen as deficient, deviant, defiant, disruptive, and disrespectful. What they bring to the classroom culturally and linguistically is not seen as an asset but as a liability.

The reality is that our biases never completely go away. They simply recede or change, which is why it is important for you to know your biases, to be in control of your thought processes, and to be prepared to go responsive when necessary. I offer these three steps to check in with your biases:

1. **Check Your Filter:** I cannot stress enough the value of knowing where your information comes from, how your knowledge base developed, and how your experiences have shaped what you believe.
2. **Question Your Belief System:** Once you realize that you have received inaccurate information about the cultures and languages of others, you are compelled to then

question everything that you believe and seek out accurate information. I often share Gandhi's wise words on this topic: "A man is but the product of his thoughts; what he thinks, he becomes." Psychology research tells us that most of what we believe is formed between infancy and preadolescence, and we spend the rest of our lives debunking or reconfirming what we believe. Know that if you are getting your information from mainstream media—and that includes all the various streaming and online outlets—then you have received tainted, biased, one-sided, and shaded perspectives about the cultures and languages of others.

3. **Listen To Your Deficit Monitor:** I believe that we all have an internal voice, sound, or feeling that tells us when we are thinking with prejudice, bias, ignorance, or misinformation. This is our internal warning to stop thinking this way. The question is, do we listen to it? For me, it is a voice that tells me that I am thinking with inaccuracy, half the story, or negative thoughts. I listen most of the time to my monitor and stop thinking in deficit terms. And when I do, I pivot and begin the process of validation and affirmation.

Biased thoughts happen as fast as you can blink your eyes (Gladwell 2005). They are otherwise known as snap judgments and occur in fast-thinking mode. Ross (2014) noted that if you are human, then you are biased. Specifically, he says, "Unconscious influences dominate our everyday life. What we react to, are influenced by, see or don't see, are all determined by reactions that happen deep within our psyche" (10). What we need to do is slow our thinking down by doing the three steps outlined above. But it takes a lot of practice, which is why I suggest you pay attention to your everyday biases when you are grocery shopping, going to the movies, or walking your dog. Since, as a human, you are having first thoughts anyway, why not use the opportunity to check your filter, question your belief system, and listen to your deficit monitor?

I want to put these three steps to the test by using myself as an example. I recognize my many biased thoughts every day. In the winter of 2017, I visited Chicago. As I made my way out of the airport to the rental car shuttle, the cold hit me hard. I knew it would be cold, but I did not expect the freeze to take effect as soon I hit the outside. When I got to the shuttle stop, I noticed a man in shorts and flip-flops. I was shocked! It was 15 degrees. I felt like ice, and this guy looked like he was heading to Santa Monica Beach in California, where I am from. My first thought was, *What the hell is he doing out here like that?* My next thought was, *This is what they do.* "They" for me was white people. And as soon as I had this thought, I began my internal process:

1. I checked my filter: Where did I get my information from about Caucasians and liking the cold? I had to search my mind and experiences. And I realized it was mainly from media and also the geography of where "they" live, as far as I knew. In either case, I was misinformed or not fully informed.
2. I questioned my belief system: What did I believe about Caucasians and the cold? More importantly, what did I believe about this man? The bottom line is I could not draw any conclusions. I had to acknowledge my stereotyping.
3. I listened to my deficit monitor: I stopped thinking with a stereotype and looked at this gentleman anew, comfortable with the fact that I had no idea why he was

dressed in shorts and flip-flops in 15-degree weather. In truth, it did not matter.

In order for you to effectively VABB, you are going to have to go through the same process and eventually put it on automation. Again, I suggest you start at home, but eventually it will be about recognizing the biases and ignorance you have about your students. You cannot VABB without recognizing your first thoughts, but remember that they will not be your last thoughts. The key to being willing to recognize when you are thinking with prejudice is to know who you are culturally and linguistically, which is the next step in the changing of your mindset.

Pause to Ponder

Think of the last time you had a biased thought and how you responded. What cultural behaviors are you seeing in a negative way as it applies to your students?

Knowing Your Cultural Identity

The research is clear. The better you know who you are racially, ethnically, and nationally, the more likely you are to validate and affirm others (Villegas and Lucas 2004; Villicana, Rivera, and Dasgupta 2011). The concept is simple. When you love yourself and know who you are culturally and linguistically, you are likely to love others. The worrisome part of this concept is its opposite. If you do not love who you are culturally, then you are unlikely to be validating and affirming or to change your instruction to fit your student population. Similar to listening to your deficit monitor, knowing your identity is a prerequisite to changing your skillset or instruction in the classroom and the school climate. Discovering yourself culturally is a liberating experience because it gives you empathy. Empathy will open up your teaching and allow you to be more validating and affirming. In other words, when you are able to consider your cultural background with confidence, then you are able to walk in the shoes of your students. That walk begins with your understanding and accepting the fundamental difference between race and culture first and then seeing how the concept of the “rings of culture” connects to VABBing overall. Before distinguishing race from culture, I want to look at the bigger picture of CLR.

Purpose of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy

Given the historical context for who benefits most from culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, it is easier to understand why we need CLR. Inject the topics of race, culture, and language into almost any conversation, and you are very likely to find an intense and provocative discussion. Enter those same topics in a discussion among educators, and you encounter a surly tension with a tempered vibe. When the topics of race, culture, and language are coupled with the pressure of increasing standardized test scores, educators are faced with simple but complex choices for addressing the real issues

of diversity and improving student achievement.

The simplicity of the choices is often provided through state, federal, and district curricular mandates with quick-fix-it programs that ultimately do not address the diversity issues with substantive and sustaining change. Such mandates invariably replicate the persistent stagnation and failure of the school as an institution to meet the needs of underserved students. The difficulty of making appropriate choices is either masked in the negative beliefs, attitudes, and expectations about certain students, or it is clouded by the desire and the intention to make changes but without the knowledge of how to do so instructionally. Culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy deals with the complexity of both these negative mindsets and the well-intentioned desires to make changes that will matter.

It is worth restating: The first purpose of CLR is to refute deficit thinking by having educators undergo a change in heart and in mind about underserved students. I call this change a *mindset shift*, or as my colleague Kiechelle Russell dubbed it, a “mindshift.” In order to be culturally and linguistically responsive, educators have to shift their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge to a stance that sees what the student brings culturally and linguistically as an asset, a capability, and an element that can be built upon. In this mindshift, students are not the problem but rather the source of the solution.

A second purpose for CLR pedagogy is to clarify what is meant specifically by culture while simultaneously giving educators an awareness of some of the noted cultural and linguistic behaviors of underserved student populations. There is a lingering confusion between race and culture and the various identities that comprise who we are culturally. We are made up of at least seven separate identities, of which all but one have an unrelated cultural connection. The seven identities are race, gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, class, and age.

These identities examined in isolation say something about who we are and why we enact certain behaviors, or make what I call *cultural determinations*. The exception is race. In other words, our behaviors are culturally determined by these identities only. But race determines nothing about our behavior. For example, there are some behaviors that we do simply because of how old we are or the decade we grew up in and nothing else. Some decisions and behaviors are based on our socioeconomic identity and nothing else. Before examining other examples, I want to clearly eliminate racial identity as the one factor that has nothing to do with cultural determination.

Our racial identity is very clear: it is the biological DNA representation that gives us our blood lineage and inherited physical traits, such as bone structure and eye color. Other than that, racial identity really tells us nothing about who we are as individuals. In *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea*, Sussman states, “Anthropologists have shown for many years now that there is no biological reality to the human race. There are no major complex behaviors that directly correlate with what might be considered human ‘racial’ characteristics” (2014, 2). The salient point is that racial identity has nothing to do with our cultural identity. Racial identity does not necessitate or affect any of our other identities—age, religion, gender, ethnicity, or nationality. There is nothing that we do racially that is connected to who we are mentally or behaviorally. Although we are locked into our racial identity by birth and perhaps genomes, we remain

free to be who we are ethnically or otherwise.

On the other hand, by acknowledging our various cultural identities in explicit terms, we are acknowledging a cultural complexity that truly speaks to the kaleidoscope that has been guised under the narrowness of racial identity and the thickness of racism for too long. From an ethnocultural perspective, being African American does not mean that one is Black, if Black is seen as an ethnic identity no different from Irish, Armenian, or Jewish. Being Caucasian American does not mean that one is ethnically White Anglo-Saxon Protestant or Catholic. Villegas and Lucas (2007) define culture as the way life is organized within an identifiable community or group. This includes the ways in which a community uses language, interacts with one another, takes turns to talk, relates to time and space, and approaches learning. The group patterns that exist reflect the standards or norms used by community members to make sense of the world. Clifford Geertz defined culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which ‘men’ communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Sussman 2014, 161). Simply, cultural identity is the way we see the world.

Race vs. Ethnicity

Confusion between race and ethnicity is very common. To better understand the difference, consider a geographic area that has been historically racially homogeneous, such as Asia or West Africa. Then, think about the myriad cultural differences that exist among people living in this area (see the Iceberg Concept of Culture on page 41). These nuances of culture define one’s ethnicity.

Culture or ethnic identity differs from race, nationality, and socioeconomic identity in that our ethnocultural identity is passed down from generation to generation. Sometimes, who we are ethnoculturally can be mistaken for our national cultural identity and/or our socioeconomic cultural identity. In fact, there are behaviors that we exhibit based simply on our nationality or our economic status. Consider these two questions:

- Why do you celebrate the Fourth of July if you are a United States citizen?
- Where do you wash your clothes?

Before answering the first question, though, ask yourself if you celebrate the Fourth of July because you are White Anglo-Saxon or Mexican (ethnically and not racially speaking) or because you are a citizen of the United States. For the second question, by knowing where you wash your clothes, I can (most of the time) accurately guess your economic status. If you regularly wash your clothes at a Laundromat, washhouse, or building complex, my guess would be that you are of a lower or working socioeconomic class. If you wash your clothes in your home, then my guess would be middle class. If someone washes your clothes for you, then you might be upper class. The point is that the Independence Day that you celebrate is determined not by your ethnocultural identity but by your national cultural identity. The way you wash your clothes is not determined by your Black or White ethnicity but by your economic identity.

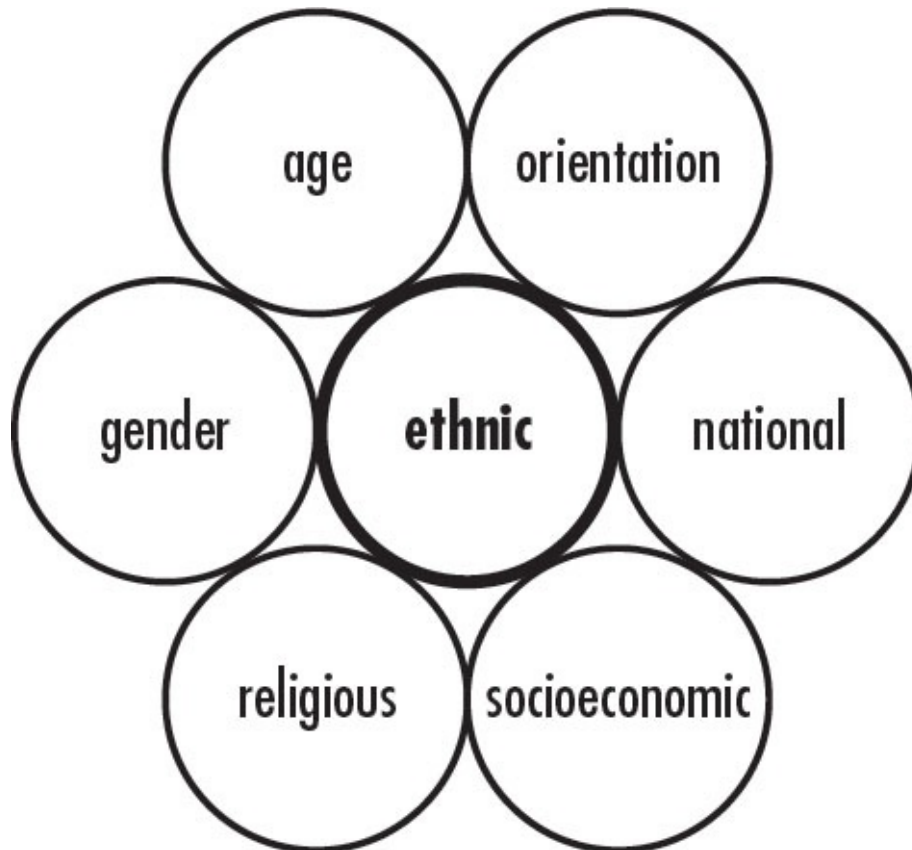
Rings of Culture Terminology

Some people find it difficult to determine which vocabulary to use to describe their Rings of Culture. In addition to confusion around ethnicity and race (see sidebar on page 37 for clarification), there are evolving terms for identifying gender and orientation with which not everyone may be familiar. Educators should familiarize

themselves with the terminology associated with these rings and understand their connotations.

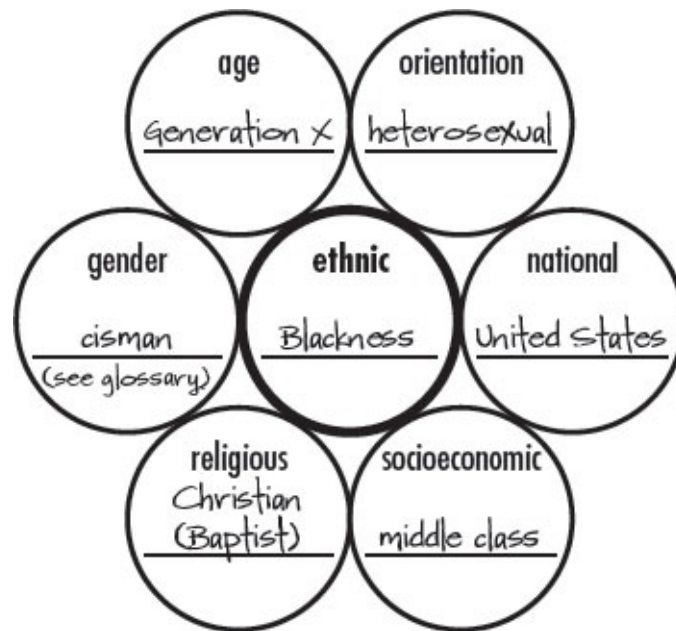
The central focus of CLR is the ethnocultural identity of students, but not to the exclusion of the other identities that define culture. Additionally, educators have to be responsive to gender culture, orientation culture, national culture, socioeconomic culture, and age culture—or what I call the *Rings of Culture*. [Figure 1.2](#) illustrates the Rings of Culture. Each of these rings is a potential source of responsiveness for the educator. Notice that race does not appear in the figure.

Fig. 1.2 Rings of Culture



Pause to Ponder

Who are you? Identify the Rings of Culture for yourself. For each ring, provide a behavior or attribute that you do solely linked to that identity. Two hints: Ethnic identity is your home culture (heritage) and race is not a culture, so it is not a ring. Consider how you might learn about your students using the rings. I have completed the Rings of Culture diagram for myself as an example.



What educators must not do is to mistake one of these cultures for another, and they certainly should not confuse any of these with race, which often happens in the classroom. Such mistakes affect the dynamics of instruction. Sometimes, educators will make judgments about African American students' behaviors as being Black ethnically when in actuality the behaviors are more in alignment with lower socioeconomic behaviors. For example, consider the familiar stereotype about some African American or Black students being unlikely to do their homework. Educators who make these assumptions about Black students generalize a socioeconomic behavior (doing homework) as an ethnocultural behavior. Indeed, the fact that some educators would conclude that Black students are less likely to do homework causes these educators to miss the opportunity to be responsive to the economic culture. Similarly, a persistent cultural myth about Mexican American students is that they value labor over education and often drop out of school because they are not interested in education. In fact, it is often structural economic pressure and depressed wages for Mexican American workers that often burden youth to forgo education to attend to immediate needs. Once again, this would be a consequence of generalizing a socioeconomic behavior as an ethnocultural behavior.

The Link Between the Rings of Culture and VABB

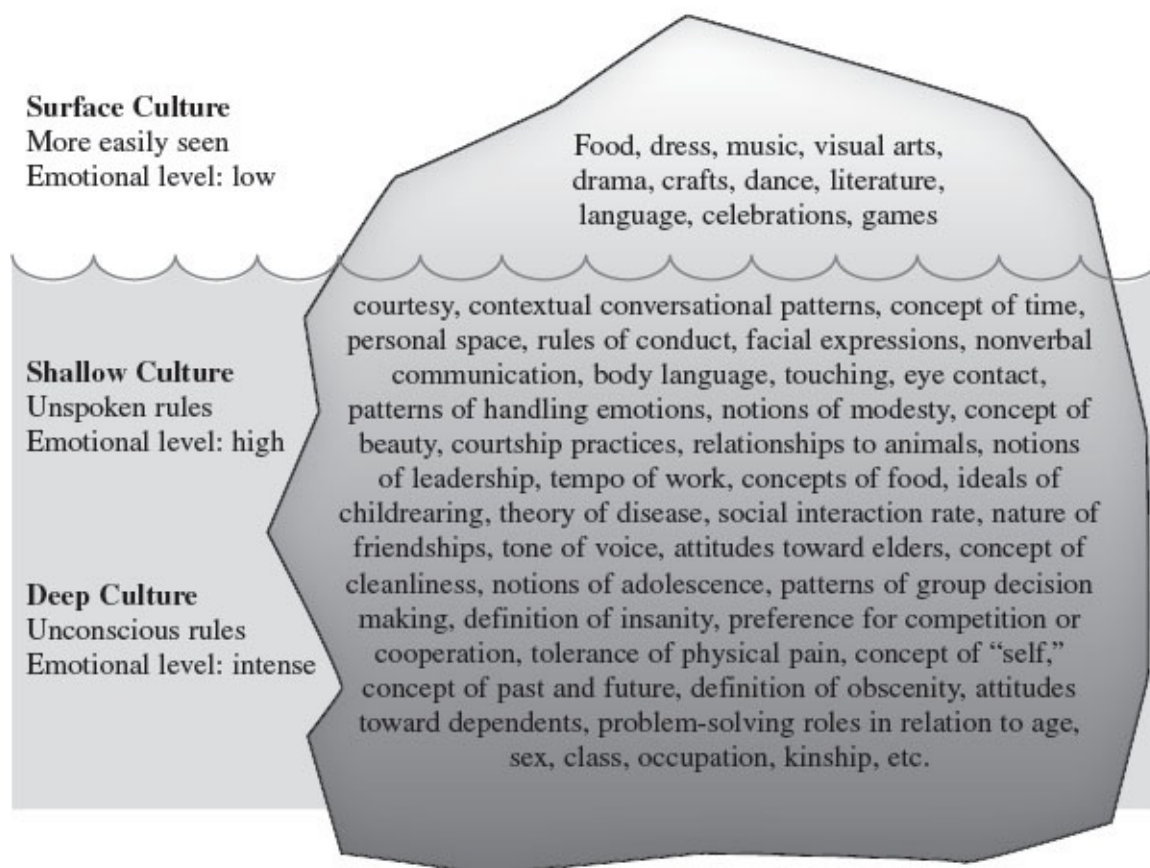
An understanding of the Rings of Culture is directly linked to the process of validating, affirming, building, and bridging, especially as it applies to ethnocultural identity. Recall that part of the purpose of CLR is to make legitimate and positive those cultural and linguistic features that have been made illegitimate and negative by institutions and mainstream media. It is the ethnocultural identity that needs to be most validated and affirmed. The issue for educators is to appropriately identify those ethnocultural behaviors. For this reason, I rely on anthropological research, going back to when the original distinctions were made between race and culture. As early as the 1800s all the way up until the 1930s, the use of race as culture had been institutionalized (for example, put in textbooks) and was considered, simply put, racist. Since my focus is not on race, I strongly encourage you to research the racist history of eugenics and other so-called scientists.

What is significant for culturally responsive educators is the work of Franz Boas, the father of American anthropology. Boas distinguished race from culture in a way that debunked what had gone heretofore. He introduced what is now known as the Iceberg Concept of Culture, uprooting the idea that race is behaviorally based. [Figure 1.3](#) shows the Iceberg Concept of Culture. It is from the Iceberg that I pull general ethnocultural behaviors, which are our home cultural behavior because we learn them from when we are born from those who are raising us, and they learned them the same way. Therefore, these behaviors represent our heritage.

Notice that the iceberg is divided into three sections: surface, shallow, and deep. To be culturally responsive, your emphasis will be on the shallow and deep behaviors, not the superficial. In fact, if you only focus on superficial culture, you are doing a disservice to cultural responsiveness overall because you are ignoring who your students really are at the deepest levels. Take a moment and look at those behaviors; they are comprehensive and expansive. For me, this list of elements of culture shows the complexity of culture and illuminates how we as educators often simplify who our students are culturally and linguistically.

Fig. 1.3 The Iceberg Concept of Culture

Like an iceberg, nine-tenths of culture is below the surface.



(Fatlu and Rodgers 1984)

In the milieu of the classroom, we focus on the most common ethnocultural behaviors, based on the work of Boykin (1983). Many of these behaviors are in stark contrast to the behaviors validated by school and mainstream culture. These behaviors include preferences for variation and spontaneity, sociocentricity, high-movement contexts, approximation of time, collaboration, inductive reasoning, verbal overlap, and pragmatic,

interpersonal, and affective language use. These cultural behaviors, which are typically viewed negatively in the culture of school, are the ones that need to be validated and affirmed. Students whose cultural norms mirror those of mainstream culture are already being VABBed. These expected behaviors of the school and mainstream culture include a focus on prompting, independence, low-movement contexts, competition, deductive reasoning, and verbal communication. Once educators have validated and affirmed students' home cultural norms and mores, they can then begin practicing CLR notably by building awareness of and bridging toward the cultural norms and mores of the school and mainstream culture. To be clear, the focus of your validating and affirming will be around the behaviors listed above because these are the behaviors that are the most common to the culture of your classroom. Throughout the rest of this text and in other CLR resources, you will see these specific behaviors referenced.

Focus on Linguistic Behaviors

Similar to culture, the linguistic behaviors of students have to be validated and affirmed in the context of their home language for the purposes of building and bridging to proficiency in Standard English and Academic Language. In order to be linguistically responsive, educators have to subscribe to the following three linguistic absolutes:

1. All language is good for the communicative purposes it serves. There is no such thing as proper English, bad English, street speech, or “gutter talk” in the context of interpersonal communication.
2. All linguistic forms are rule governed and systematic and are not randomly formed or put together haphazardly. They are regular in their phonological and syntactic patterns.
3. As infants and toddlers, beginning as early as pre-birth, we learn the language that is spoken in the home by the primary caregivers.

Understanding these three linguistic principles allows for an open-minded discussion around nonstandard languages.

The issue of the use of nonstandard linguistic forms extends beyond the United States. Corson (1997) reveals that formal educational policies for the treatment of nonstandard varieties of language are conspicuous by their absence in most educational systems. He points out that these varieties are nonetheless brought into the work of the school in one way or another. Educators have to recognize that children coming from these backgrounds often possess two or more linguistic varieties—one of which they use in their home and community and another that they use in school. Still, other forms may exist. The bottom line is that students speaking nonstandard language varieties are frequently penalized for using language that is different from the linguistic capital that has high status in the school.

Corson (1997) chronicles how the history of prejudice against the users of nonstandard varieties of a dominant language probably can be traced to the Ancient Greeks. Evidence shows that the use of different Greek dialects was used as a way of stereotyping other Greeks. A Roman playwright, Publilius Syrus, wrote that “speech is a mirror to the soul; as a man speaks, so is he” (Syrus). In France, the purpose of the *Académie française* was

to maintain the purity of the French standard variety. A national policy such as this has a direct impact on schooling for French children. Similarly, in Spain and Portugal, the standard varieties are elevated. Sometimes, negative consequences affect those speakers of nonstandard varieties.

In the United States, William Labov's studies (1972) of Black American and Puerto Rican vernaculars of English have proven to be groundbreaking. He found that people from different sociocultural backgrounds speak different kinds of English that, in important aspects, deviate systematically and regularly from one another. These findings helped to overturn the common stereotype that these and many other varieties of language are incorrect forms of English. Labov's legacy has been the evidence that nonstandard language varieties have their particular norms and rules of use. Therefore, these language forms deserve respect and valuation. However, the institution of education itself as a standard and routine practice devalues varieties that are very different from the dominant form.

The nonstandard languages that become the focus of applying linguistically responsive pedagogy are tied to the specific populations described here. These languages are Hawaiian Pidgin English (HPE), Chicano English (CE), American Indian dialects, and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Each of these linguistic entities has its rule-governed system. Inclusive of all the language dimensions, examples of specific features of these languages are provided in [Chapter 6](#).

Labov (1972) has argued that there is no real basis for attributing poor performance to the grammatical and phonological characteristics of any nonstandard variety of English. He found that it was not African American Vernacular English itself but teachers' low expectations based on linguistic misperceptions that were the culprit of academic failure. The students were deemed deficient because their language variety was wrongly judged in the context of school language. Generally speaking, educational policy for the use of nonstandard language forms is limited mainly because of simple ignorance about the range of varieties that can and do coexist in a single linguistic space (Corson 1997).

When educators recognize students' linguistic behaviors or the use of the rules of home languages as positives and not deficits, they can then begin to validate and affirm students' language. Consequently, teachers can begin the process of building and bridging that will enable students to succeed within the context of school culture and language.

Pause to Ponder

Including the unaccepted languages defined above, what are the various home languages in your class and school?

Identifying the Beneficiaries of Responsiveness

Without a doubt, the changing of an educator's mind-set and skill set benefits all students, regardless of their culture. Validation and affirmation is for everyone. There are some students, however, who will benefit more from this than others. Identifying who

these students are focuses your advocacy and instruction. Since the beginning of state-mandated standardized testing, there are four groups—Mexican American, African American, Hawaiian American, and American Indian—that have been traditionally underserved, failing academically or behaviorally because the school is not culturally responsive (Hollie 2012; New American Foundation 2008). Through advocacy, CLR teaching and learning calls for specific discussions around certain students and particular issues that directly affect them. For instruction, educators implementing CLR identify the most underserved—any student who is not successful academically, socially, and/or behaviorally because of the school’s unresponsiveness to the student’s needs.

The Benefits of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy

The simple answer to the question of who benefits from culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy is *all students*. A more specific answer delves into who these students are most likely to be in the sense of culture (not race) in the classroom. A survey of any past or recent standardized data gives the answer of who is and who is not achieving in our schools. In the context of academic failure and behavior issues, CLR most benefits *any* student who is identified as *underserved* as opposed to the more commonly labeled *underachieving* or *underperforming* student.

According to my definition that follows, the school as an institution is failing the student. Granted, the breadth of the definition speaks to the simplicity of who can be served by CLR. At face value, *underserved* includes many students. If teachers think about the underserved students in their particular classrooms, they are probably thinking of students of varying ethnicities, languages, and ability levels (low and high). The term *underserved* encompasses those students who are receiving bad customer service from the school, similar to you or me receiving subpar service at a restaurant or a department store. The difference is that we can ask to see a manager or even walk out of the establishment. Students cannot! They are stuck in a situation where the institution is failing them, so instead of asking for the manager, they simply check out mentally and emotionally. Or even worse, far too many stop attending school and are labeled *dropouts*, although in many cases they have been *pushed out*.

Who Are the Students Most Likely to Be Underserved?

Looking more specifically at which groups of students are likely to be underserved reveals why CLR is really important and shows the complexity involved in implementing the approach. Imagine that we asked all the underserved students you identified to come to the gymnasium. Research tells us who these students are most likely to be: African Americans, Mexican Americans (as opposed to the overgeneralized term *Latino*), American Indians, Samoan Americans and/or Eastern Asian immigrants, and Asian Americans (Goodwin 2011). Keep in mind that the overall intention is to better serve all students, but when we look at who is in the gymnasium now, we find these to be primarily students of color. The students are like those dissatisfied customers in a department store

who need to be better served simply because of their place in the gymnasium and not endemically because of their race, nationality, ethnicity, or language. Bluntly put, we serve them because they are in the gymnasium of the underserved, not because of who they are racially, ethnically, or otherwise. In order to fully understand why students of color in particular are in the room, we need to examine the sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and sociolinguistic contexts.

Sociohistorical Context

The capstone research of John Ogbu (1978) indicates that many of these students can be described as involuntary immigrants to America. Ogbu posited that the experience in the American school was very different for an involuntary immigrant when compared to that of a voluntary immigrant or the Ellis Island immigrants. Involuntary immigrants, historically speaking, are more likely to be found in the so-called achievement gap and less likely to have post-secondary opportunities that lead to economic success. Voluntary immigrants, on the other hand, tend to perform well academically and find post-secondary opportunities that lead to economic viability and stability. The significant difference is that the involuntary immigrants' move to America comes through colonization, enslavement, conquest, or less than legal means. Simply put, these immigrants did not come through Ellis Island.

Whereas the path to success in the American school for the voluntary immigrant has come through a process of successful assimilation, the path for the involuntary immigrant and indigenous peoples has been more a process of forced or unsuccessful assimilation. The relevance of assimilation cannot be emphasized enough. In order to attain the American dream, most immigrants will have to assimilate into mainstream culture. The formula for success in academia and mainstream culture is straightforward. When offered the option of assimilating from one's indigenous (home) culture and language into that of the mainstream culture, many ethnic groups had great success in pursuing and achieving the American dream. On the contrary, those ethnic groups that were forced into the mainstream culture did not have a choice. Consequently, they did not have access to the tools that would have enabled them to become part of mainstream society. For example, the long-lasting effects of slavery, legal segregation, and institutional racism on the education of Africans in America have been well documented, and these factors still resonate in schools today (Anderson 1995; Smith 1998; Williams and Snipper 1990). Over 30 years ago, Ogbu said, "Before 1960 most societies did not provide their minorities with equal educational opportunities" (1978, 91). Howard (1988) professes that of the innumerable rights African Americans were denied during slavery, none were more important than education. The same can be said for many of the involuntary immigrant groups. According to Javier San Roman, former student advocate at the Culture and Language Academy of Success (CLAS) and now a consultant in national work for Mexican-American students, the introduction to compulsory public education began with the inferior segregated Mexican schools that operated throughout the Southwestern United States. Often, the rationale given for segregation of non-Black students at this time was that Mexican children posed potential health risks or were not redeemable outside of providing a basic level of education that was designed to prepare them for low-wage manual labor. Notable school desegregation court cases, such as *Roberto Alvarez v. Lemon*

Grove School District in 1931 (the country's first successful school desegregation court victory) and *Mendez et al. v. Westminster* in 1947, dealt a significant blow to the rationale behind school segregation for all students.

For the American Indian and Hawaiian students, the process of the introduction to public education was carried forth through the boarding schools and academies that were designed to save the "native" and kill the "savage." At the Indian boarding schools, students were deliberately alienated from their language and culture and taught to value the alleged superiority of European culture and language. The early experiences of Native Hawaiian students mirrored the devaluation of their cultural and linguistic heritage in favor of European models. The collective experience of all involuntary immigrants and indigenous Americans in public education has been one of institutional neglect and a pervasive and pernicious deficit oriented toward the cultural and linguistic differences that they bring to the classroom.

Sociopolitical Context

The systematic denial of indigenous culture and language for involuntary immigrants was utilized as a means to eliminate their culture and linguistic heritages. These populations were in effect institutionally denied their own culture and, at the same time, were not given the opportunity to become part of mainstream culture. Joel Spring calls this process *deculturalization*. He defines deculturalization as the "educational process of destroying a people's culture and replacing it with a new culture. It is one of the most inhumane acts one can partake in. Culture shapes a person's beliefs, values, and morals. In the United States, historically the education system deculturalized the cultures of [American Indians], African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and immigrants from Ireland, Southern and Eastern Europe, and Asia" (1994, 7). Providing further evidence referring to American Indians, Spring notes, "Missionaries wanted to develop written [American Indian] Languages not as a means of preserving [American Indian] history and religions, but so they could translate religious tracts to teach protestant Anglo-Saxon culture. In contrast, Sequoyah development of a written Cherokee language was for the purpose of preserving Cherokee culture" (1994, 28).

Angela Valenzuela terms this process of eliminating one's home culture as *subtractive schooling*. Subtractive schooling is the divestment of important social and cultural resources for students, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure and the discouragement of cultural identity by presenting such characteristics as undesirable. Valenzuela says of the Mexican American student, "I came to locate 'the problem' of achievement squarely in school-based relationships and organizational structures and policies designed to erase students' culture. Over the three years in which I collected and analyzed my data, I became increasingly convinced that schooling is organized in ways that subtract resources from Mexican youth" (1999, 10). Part of being culturally and linguistically responsive requires the intentional effort to combat the long-lasting effects of deculturalization through validation and affirmation of the home language and culture. To effectively implement CLR, educators must recognize and understand the cultural and linguistic behaviors that need to be legitimized and made positive.