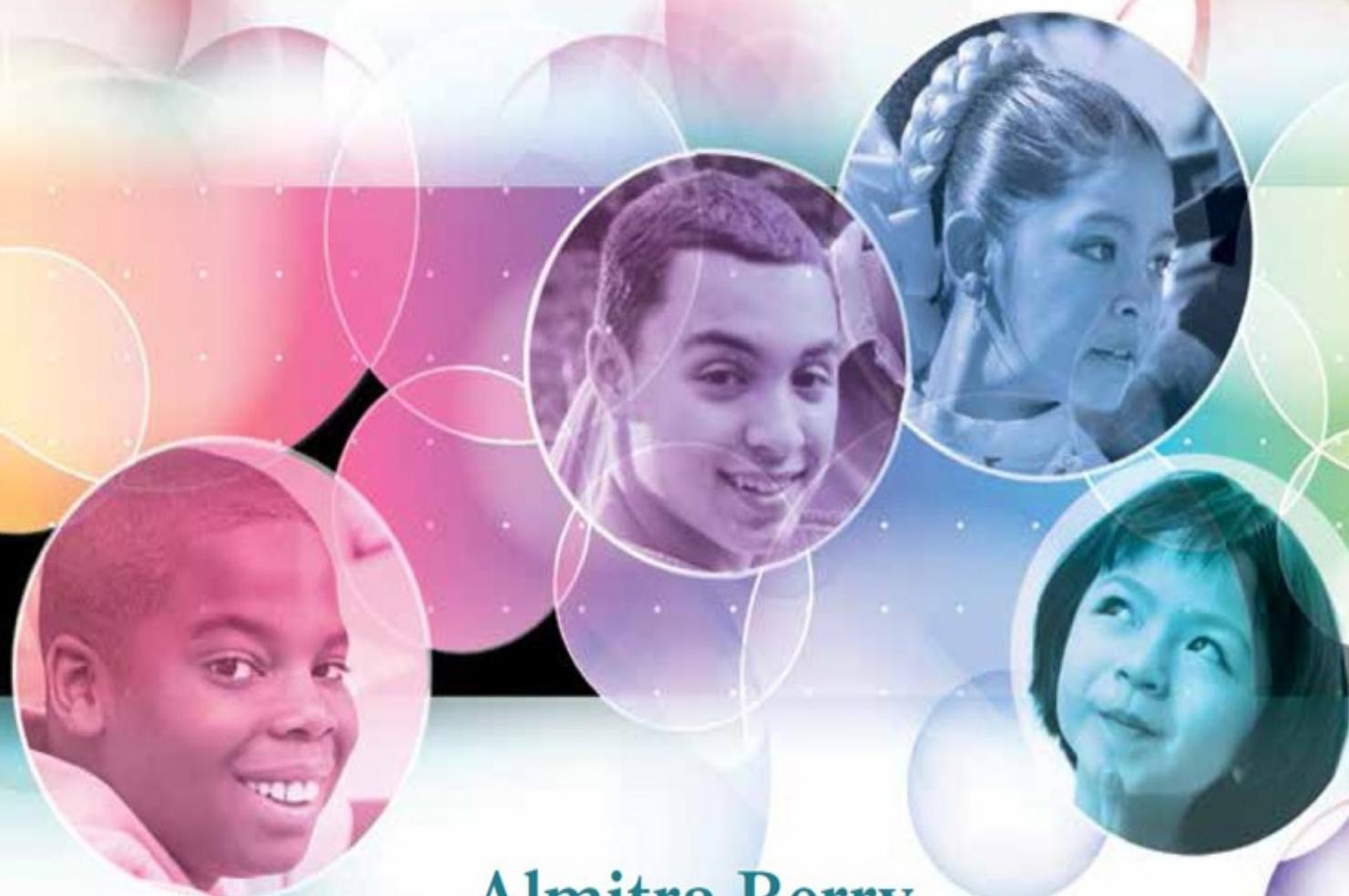




Effecting Change

Intervention *for*
Culturally *and* Linguistically
Diverse Learners



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Chapter 1

Building and Activating Our Own Schema

We are a culturally diverse society. Culturally and linguistically diverse learners have distinct characteristics and learning disabilities. Educators often cite this fact as one of their most difficult challenges. This book provides the foundation for a culturally appropriate response to intervention model. If properly implemented, schools can reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to special education services and allow a greater number of students, specifically students of diverse cultures and language backgrounds, to remain in the general education population while receiving appropriate instruction. Failure to respond to intervention must be correctly documented, and the use of appropriate, valid and reliable assessment measures must be employed to continually adjust instruction and reduce the referral rate. Unfortunately, the procedural demands of this process are often overlooked in credential programs.

Who Are Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners, and Why Do They Need Different Instruction?

First, we must define culture. Simply defined, culture is the information, norms, values, behaviors, and morals of a group. But this simplistic definition fails to address the specifics: What information? Which norms, values, and behaviors? Who determines them? Whose morals, and what are they? The culture of an ethnic group varies from one neighborhood to another, and even from one household to another. So, before we move forward on this journey, take a moment to examine your own beliefs about culture. By the end of this chapter, you may start to notice your beliefs being challenged. Philosophically, culture is socially, not genetically, transmitted. It is porous, changing, influenced internally and externally, and likely to contain subcultures that stray from the original culture. Culture and subculture exist as essential elements that cannot be disregarded in today's classrooms. Yes, culture is comprised of the norms, values, behaviors, and morals common to a group. Each person may participate and operate in multiple cultures over the course of any day. Think of your own school. The culture of your school may be distinctly different from the culture of your classroom, your home, your extended family, and the families of your students.

Functionalists believe that educational systems exist to propagate the

accepted culture of a society. So, there must be some agreement on which values, norms, morals, attitudes, and behaviors should be transferred to the students, especially if those students do not share the broader society's culture. Others question whether a consensus even exists in American society, and if there is any type of societal consensus about core values.

The topic of culture becomes more important when talking about the culture of marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, language minorities, and students of lower socioeconomic status. When a group compares its knowledge of purpose, general knowledge, and influences to society as a whole, those marginalized groups tend to create an identity that is socially unique (Pai, Adler, and Shadiow 2005). Multiple cultures may exist in your classroom. Some see this as a good thing, others see it as a challenge. For teaching and learning, a multicultural environment presents both unique opportunities and challenges.

You and your students must be able to adjudicate through cross-cultural conflicts in a society that is undergoing rapid social changes. Whatever our culture or cultures, our norms, rituals, and traditions may be attacked or ridiculed—but they are still ours. Your students have theirs. As they learn to operate in ours, we must accept theirs and add to it what will be beneficial, without removing that which is valuable and necessary for them to operate in their home environments. This requires that we learn to look at students through a variety of lenses. We have to get out of our comfort zones. We must transcend culture in order to be effective. The comprehension of the culture of school and the culture of students' homes is essential to success—our success in teaching, and their success in learning. One component of the socio-cultural process involves the acquisition of a second language at school. The core of acquisition incorporates all the surrounding social and cultural processes that occur through everyday life within the student's past, present, and future and in all contexts. These contexts include home, school, community, and society. For example, at school, the instructional environment in a class structure may create social and psychological distance between groups. Community or social patterns such as prejudice and discrimination expressed towards groups or individuals in personal contexts can influence student achievement in school as well as societal problems. Negative patterns can strongly influence a student's response to the new language (Tozer, Violas, and Senese 2002). Hopefully this book will help you question your beliefs about the purpose of education and the practices you were taught. Through questioning, you may see the purpose of school very differently than when you were a beginning teacher.

This book sets forth a practical, socio-culturally relevant approach to intervention. Think of the classroom as its own unique culture, comprised of students whose cultural reality is both independent of and external to the reality of school. Teaching and learning must be based on the recognition that an alternate reality exists in the lives of many, if not all, of our students. The culturally and linguistically diverse student may not be able to transcend his or her situation. However, they create schemata from experiences both within and outside of school that may be used to solve problems in all of the students' environments.

Consider the many different contexts, the varying environments, circumstances, and perspectives that children face in their day-to-day lives. School imparts a culture, a perspective, and a set of norms. School provides a model for students to carry into the larger context of society. So, it seems to be a good idea to establish a universal set of core standards for behavior and decision making. That core set of standards rests on readily accepted beliefs about "good" and "bad" practices. This is necessary from a legal standpoint, because we must protect children. It is also necessary from an ethical perspective, because what is unethical (while not necessarily illegal) might harm children. At the same time, we have to take into account the ethical code of the students' home culture. It may conflict with the core set of standards we apply at school. As educators, then, we must approach our students with an understanding of our differences and strive to create a balance. We must view each student through two frames: we must see them as they exist within our classrooms, and we must see them as they realistically must function in their home environment.

Plato taught that good and bad can only be comprehended from within the context of a particular social order. Moral behavior at home might be immoral behavior in the school. For example, cheating—an unethical behavior at school—may be viewed as collaborative community building by students from another culture. If a cultural moral code states that the duty an intelligent child is to provide assistance to those who may struggle academically, then goodness follows from teaching a peer. But in most of our classrooms, there is a fine line between peer-to-peer teaching and cheating; this is a line that may be unintentionally crossed by a student from a different home culture, unless that boundary is clearly defined by the teacher.

Aristotle taught that good and bad are based on the relationship between natural laws and man's laws. So, in this context, a student would view cheating as a negative thing only if there were expressed rules governing the behavior, and only if the students helped to establish the rules. If the

rules of the classroom stated that students were to assist their peers as a way to contribute to society, then the behavior would be ethical. If the students did not help to create the rules, however, then they will not internally view those rules as applicable or relevant. The code of home and the code of school must be recognized and valued, or we risk losing the respect of the whole child by ignoring a significant part.

What Is Linguistic Diversity?

What is your definition of linguistic diversity? This question is not easily answered. When you think of linguistic diversity, do you consider those students who speak only English, but whose English is not strong enough to engage in deep conversation because they lack the vocabulary to articulate their thoughts? Does your definition include English-only speakers who have grammatical and syntactical patterns that do not adhere to the conventions of school English? If so, great! You are on the right track. If not, take a minute to broaden your scope. Often, we think of English language learners as a group of children identified as such based on a test. School systems around the country have many different labels for these students and the instructional programs they receive. The most common acronyms and terms and what they mean are shown in the chart below:

Common Acronyms and Terms and Their Definitions	
0.5 Lingual	Students who are neither proficient in their home language nor in school English (also, <i>semilingual</i>).
AAVE (African American Vernacular English)	The distinct, complex, and rule-governed linguistic system featuring semantic and syntactic conventions expressed in patterns divergent from school English (SE).
CLDL (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learner)	Learners who come from homes whose cultures are not mainstream, middle-class, Anglo American and/or who come from language backgrounds other than school English.
ELD (English Language Development)	Instruction in the listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking domains of the English language; usually designed for English language learners from non-English based home languages.
ELL (English Language Learner)	The student, usually identified and rated by formal assessment, who comes to school with a home language other than school English.
ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages)	See <i>ELL</i> .
FEP (Fluent English Proficient)	A student whose English is sufficient to participate in instruction without specialized or scaffolded instruction.
IFEP (Initially Fluent English Proficient)	Identified ELLs who enter school with fluent English although they come from a home where other than English is spoken.

Common Acronyms and Terms and Their Definitions <i>(cont.)</i>	
LM (Language Minority)	A student whose primary language is not the majority (English) language.
LEP (Limited English Proficient)	A student whose English is limited to the point where they cannot fully participate in English instruction without support, scaffolded instruction, or targeted intervention for language development.
NEP (Non-English Proficient)	A student whose English is so limited that it precludes accessing mainstream instruction. (See also <i>newcomer</i> .)
Newcomer	A student who has no comprehension of English; generally, a new arrival to the United States.
Redesignee	A student whose proficiency in English has risen to the point that they are no longer non- or limited in English, but rather fluent English proficient.
SE (School/Standard English)	The linguistic system that is spoken in schools, featuring the grammar, usage, and mechanics of the English language accepted as the standard for textbook instruction.
SEL (School/Standard English Learner)	A student learning the English of school even though their home language may be English.
Semilingual	Students proficient neither in their home language nor school English. (See also <i>0.5 Lingual</i> .)

Think again about the question, “Who are English language learners?” Often overlooked are some Native Americans, some African Americans, and some students of poverty who come to school lacking a strong grasp of school English (SE), even though English may be the only language they know. They do not take the language assessments that would classify them as English language learners because they do not have a foreign language background.

Educators need to understand the differences among students in order to create a more culturally congruent classroom. The cultural differences theory takes a classroom-level view so teachers can understand the factors that lead to low achievement among minority students. This book will assist you in creating a classroom that provides the highest possible academic achievement for all students. Also discussed is the labor market theory of Ogbu (1987) that includes the global and cultural elements that cause system-wide suppression of academic achievement for culturally and linguistically diverse learners (CLDLs). By blending these two theories, this book offers a perspective that will be useful for the classroom teacher, the instructional leader at a school site, or for a district-wide study of the

educational system.

Effective instruction for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds calls for a variety of instructional activities and other strategies. Those strategies, activities, and methodologies require us to take the children's diversity of experience into account.

Many of the important educational innovations in current practice, such as flexible- and mixed-age grouping, are the direct result of teachers who have adapted instruction to meet the challenges posed by teaching children from diverse backgrounds. It is vital that teachers be cognizant of how a student's home and home culture experiences affect his or her values, patterns of language use, and interpersonal style. Children are likely to be more responsive to a teacher who is sensitive to their culture and its behavioral patterns.

Major Demographics Impacting Schools and Classrooms Today

Educational journals, blogs, and various websites all consistently report on one demographic pattern: the fastest growing population in America's schools are linguistically diverse students. With this diversity also comes cultural diversity. It is important to recognize those groups most frequently left behind.

Today, limited English proficient (LEP) students are the most rapidly growing population in American schools. Between 1993 and 2003, the percentage of English language learners at elementary and secondary schools increased by over 50%, from 2.8 to more than 4 million children. Many states experienced even higher growth rates of 200% or more, such as Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Indiana, and North Carolina (Cohen, Deterding, and Clewell 2005).

As more children with home languages other than English enter schools, more teachers will face the challenge of instructing children who have limited English language skills—an experience no longer exclusive to teachers in particular schools or geographical areas. All teachers will need to know something about how children learn a second language. Intuitive assumptions can be erroneous. Children's progress can be hindered, and they could be affected emotionally if we have unrealistic expectations or inaccurate understandings of the process of language learning and its relationship to acquiring other academic skills and knowledge. (See [Chapter 7](#) for further discussion.)

Some historical context is needed to frame our thinking. The land we call

America has never been monolingual. Native American tribes spoke hundreds of indigenous languages throughout the territory before European colonization. Spanish-speaking settlements in the Southwest not only preceded English settlements on the East Coast, but thrived throughout the Southwest, from California to Texas and as far north as Wyoming, until Mexico ceded the Southwest in 1848. Even in the 13 original colonies, German was spoken as early as 1683 when religious refugees founded Germantown, Pennsylvania.

By the late 1700s, German Americans accounted for over 8.5% of the country's European population. German was used as the language of instruction in schools throughout the states of the Midwest where a new generation of German immigrants settled (Wiley 1998). Although French speakers made up less than 1% of the population in the 1790 census, the acquisition of Louisiana in 1803 added substantially to that figure, including speakers of Cajun French and French Creole (Gilbert 1981). In addition to the indigenous languages of the territory and the languages of European colonists and immigrants, the linguistic diversity of African slaves contributed further to the country's diverse linguistic heritage.

While America has more than twice the number of speakers of other languages (ESOL) now than in the past, the percentage of the total population is actually less: 17.9% now as compared to 24% in 1910 and 25% in 1790 (Wiley and Wright 2004). Today, however, the diversity of languages other than English spoken is greater (McKay and Wong 2000). Despite this multilingual, multicultural heritage, languages other than English have continuously been viewed as a problem or threat to national unity. From the linguistic isolation of African slaves and forced assimilation and isolation of Native Americans during westward expansionism, to the Americanization campaign of the early to mid-20th century, we have endeavored to acculturate and linguistically assimilate a culturally and linguistically diverse population.

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s impacted the general prejudice against languages other than English through policy, and perhaps popularly as well. One gain made during this era was in the education of children from language minority groups. Their educational needs up to that point were neglected and their native language skills were at best considered irrelevant or at worst were brutally repressed. The results of this mistreatment included elevated dropout rates, lower academic achievement, and fewer college-bound students and college graduates (Wiley and Wright 2004). Civil rights groups and parents pressured school systems to reconsider the total immersion approach—popularly known as “sink-or-

swim”—that dominated the educational experience of students with limited English proficiency. This occurred through lawsuits, student boycotts, and increased involvement in the political process.

When President George W. Bush introduced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, he echoed the sentiment of President Lyndon Baines Johnson’s introduction of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. Both presidents referenced the discouraging plight of some children: the African American, Hispanic, urban, and the poor. In 1965 and even today, these are still the children the American educational system holds back and leaves behind. These are the children most often discarded as “uneducable, under-educable, learning disabled, having special needs, and a host of other categories” as we rationalize their poor academic performance (Gant 2005). Education remains the most viable route from poverty. Every child merits education.

A student’s self-concept is strongly affected by the value teachers and student peers place on the use of various languages. For effective learning to take place, a student needs to have a positive self-concept. As teachers, if our words or deeds indicate to a student that his or her primary language is wrong or incorrect, the learner’s self-confidence is diminished, and might hinder their ability to learn (Tozer, Violas, and Senese 2002).

During the past 20 years, rapidly increasing language minority demographics have had a major impact on our schools. There have been varied instructional approaches that educators have undertaken to address the concern for providing a meaningful education for language minority students, but many of us are still struggling to identify the most effective educational practices. A great deal of misunderstanding occurs because many policy-makers—as well as educators—assume that language learning can be isolated from other issues, and that non-native speakers of English must learn English before learning anything else. Not only is this an overly simplistic perception, it does not work. Four specific groups of students continue to show historically poor academic performance:

- African American
- Latino American
- recent immigrants
- students of poverty (Title I eligible)

In 1992, 25% of English language learners in high poverty schools had repeated at least one grade level. In 1987, the U.S. Department of Education found that African Americans made up 12% of the general

student population, but 24% of the special education population. Between 1976 and 1994, the percentage of Hispanic children identified as learning disabled increased from 24% to 51%.

Fast-forward to the present. Today, the 20 largest U.S. school districts are disproportionately minority in composition—65%—with disproportionately higher poverty levels (KewalRamani et al 2007). Balfanz and Legters (2004) found, “A majority minority high school is five times more likely” to promote less than 40% of incoming freshmen to senior status in four years. Lower socioeconomic status children enter school with language deficits, which translate to reading deficits, resulting in the achievement gaps prevalent in large urban districts (Wise et al. 2007).

As an instructional coach, I have often heard teachers complain that the parents were not pulling their weight in educating their children. The data tells us part of the story. DeBell and Chapman (2006) reported only 46% of Black and 48% of Hispanic students have computer access at home, compared to 78% of White and 74% of Asian students. Only 26% of Black and Hispanic students have home access to the Internet. Further, only 39% of students eligible for Title I, compared to 76% of non-poverty students, have computer access at home; only 19% of students eligible for Title I have home Internet access (DeBell and Chapman 2006).

How can we ask the parents, many of whom have no more than a high school education, to do what we as educators are unable to do? We have not taught the children to read, write, calculate, and think. These parents are bringing us the best children they have. Just as they trust the physician to diagnose and treat their children when they are ill, they trust us to teach their children to read, write, calculate, and think. We are the trusted practitioners with the remedies for illiteracy and innumeracy.

Effective education of culturally and linguistically diverse learners affirms the values of the home culture and instills in the child a positive emotional attitude toward his or her own background (McLaughlin 1992). This means that diversity of experience is taken into account for curriculum design and delivery. Some of the innovations in Response to Intervention (RTI) in this book are the direct result of adapting instruction to meet these challenges.

A multicultural, reconstructionist education calls for classrooms that reflect and celebrates diversity. Perspectives and contributions of diverse groups should be expressed and conceptually displayed at all times across subject areas. Bilingualism or multilingualism should be endorsed. However, classroom diversity is not an excuse for lowered expectations.

Every child can learn. Culturally appropriate response to intervention (CA-RTI) is a method of intervention that takes students' cultures, backgrounds, and languages into account and allow equal access to all students while building on their learning styles, cultural, and language abilities.

Conclusion

CLDLs are the fastest growing population in America's public schools; to change the life trajectories of students most at risk, we must begin with these children. Debate over the best instructional methods for these learners has been waged for some time and will likely persist. That which makes us unique also fosters cultural and linguistic diversity challenges. Therefore, we must find the best practices for teaching in terms of language of instruction, methodology, and axiology.

Reflect and Act

1. Define and describe the culture and the various languages of your classroom and your school. Identify practices that are culturally subtractive; then, eliminate those practices.
2. Revisit your definition of culture from the beginning of the chapter. Has it changed? What new understandings have you gained about cultural and linguistic diversity?

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