Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: Issues in Education

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CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- to introduce terminology associated with cultural, racial/ethnic, and language diversity;
- to explore factors related to the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students;
- to explore issues related to identifying and educating children who need special education services in a diverse society;
- to understand how learning styles influence the learning process for students; and
- to develop effective strategies for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students.

KEY TERMS

- culture
- culturally diverse students
- social class
- socioeconomic status (SES)
- ethnicity
- race
- language
- linguistically diverse students
- learning style
- metarecognition
- culturally relevant pedagogy
We live in a world with an abundant array of diversity. Diversity is evident in people, the environment, and all forms of life. Advancements in technology have made the world seem smaller and increased the interaction between people from different cultures. The world’s economy has become increasingly globalized, fuelling the rapid expansion of immigration to industrialized countries over the last 60 years. Today, in the United States, it is not unusual to find classrooms where three or four different languages and cultures are represented. In order to educate the future generations of our society effectively, the education system must be successful teaching all children to communicate and interact with people from different backgrounds and with different abilities. In addition, if we are to maintain a country where social mobility and opportunity are viable possibilities, educators must find ways to offer an excellent education to all students regardless of their background. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss several issues related to educating children in a diverse society.

**Characterizing Diversity**

Diversity is a fundamental aspect of our world and a defining characteristic of the field of special education. This chapter concerns the education of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds who may or may not have disabilities that require special education services. For culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, issues of diversity, difference, and disability can be quite complex and challenging for classroom teachers. In order to better discuss these challenges, specific terms common in discussions of diversity require explanation.

**Culture and Cultural Diversity**

**Culture** is a broad and comprehensive concept that includes all the ways of being. Culture is learned throughout life as one participates in family and social networks (Gollnick & Chin, 2006). Cultures have several components, including values and behavioral styles; language and dialects; nonverbal communications; and perspectives, worldviews, and frames of reference (Banks, 2006). Cultural practices are shared within a specific group and may or may not be shared across groups. It is important to recognize that cultures are always changing because individuals, groups, and the surrounding environment are always changing. Therefore, it is difficult to develop a single, permanent definition of a culture.

In every culture, subgroups may form. Subgroups can differ by any of the components of culture, including ethnicity, language, class, religion, and geography. These subgroups can be very different from each other, even though they share some traits and values. Often members of the dominant society or subgroup of a culture view their culture as correct and all others as incorrect or even inferior. Historically, the mainstream culture in the United States has been Western European, deriving from political, economic, and language systems in Great Britain (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009). The United States also has a history of limited full access to mainstream culture for those members of society who are not racially white or Caucasian.

In this chapter, the term **culturally diverse students** will be used to refer to “students who may be distinguished [from the mainstream culture] by ethnicity, social class, and/or language” (Perez, 1998, p. 6). As such, this term may refer to students who are from racial/ethnic minority groups, students whose primary language is not English, and students who are from low-income or poor households. However, it is also important to remember that all students are culturally diverse regardless of their ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic status. We limit our definition along lines of ethnicity, social class, and race because of the historic and current marginalization these groups have experienced and how these experiences have resulted in inequitable schooling practices.
In the United States, CLD students are disproportionately overrepresented among poor and low-income households. Therefore, the relationship between culture and social class is relevant to discussions surrounding the education of CLD students. Often the terms social class and socioeconomic status (SES) are used interchangeably and refer to “distinctions not only in income but also in property ownership, occupation, education, personal and family life, and education of children” (Taylor, 1986, p. 22). American institutions, including schools, tend to adopt what are typically thought of as “middle-class” ideologies to guide practice. These ideologies are associated with the quality of life of society’s economically and socially privileged. Although these ideologies are not exclusively middle class, they are culturally influenced and may manifest in different ways for families from diverse backgrounds.

- **Race, Ethnicity, and Racial/Ethnic Diversity**

Race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably, but they are different. Ethnicity is defined by group membership based on genealogy, national origin, and ancestry. Ethnicity does not change, even though characteristics of a specific ethnic group’s culture may change. For example, the label “Native American ethnicity” includes numerous tribal groups whose lifestyles vary extensively.

Race is a term that attempts to categorize human beings into distinct groups according to phenotypes or physical traits (e.g., skin color, eye shape). Throughout history, race has been used as a social, cultural, and biological construct to group people (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009). The concept of race has changed over time and continues to be difficult to define because our current knowledge of biological science does not support the idea that there are meaningful biological differences between races.

- **Language and Language Diversity**

Language can be defined as a means of communication that shapes cultural and personal identity and socializes one into a cultural group (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006). Language can be nonverbal (e.g., facial expressions, gestures) and verbal (e.g., actual speech used in conversations). Language also includes both oral (i.e., listening and speaking) and written (i.e., reading and writing) components. It is impossible to separate language and culture. One cannot be defined without the other. In order to participate fully in a culture, one must learn that culture’s language. Conversely, in order to be fluent in a language, one must learn the culture that language represents.

Students from diverse language backgrounds encounter this difficulty every day in schools. Because language and culture are so intertwined, language minority students are expected to learn and use a new language and new cultural dispositions effectively. Often this new language and culture is different from what they have learned at home. In this chapter, the term linguistically diverse students will be used to refer to “students whose first language is either a language other than English or a language other than the middle class, mainstream English used in schools” (Perez, 1998, p. 5). As such, this term refers to students who are second language learners, limited English proficient, bilingual, language minority students, and nonmainstream dialect speakers.

- **Diversity in Schools Today**

The changing ethnic, racial, and cultural composition of the United States is well documented. Census data from 2000 indicate several trends towards a more culturally and linguistically diverse society (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). For instance, one indicator of the changing face of America is that, although the birthrate in the United States is decreasing, the proportion of children from non-white and non-English speaking backgrounds...
is increasing. In addition, over the last 20 years, the Hispanic population in the United States has doubled. It is estimated that one in every four people in the United States is from a racial or ethnic background other than white. Obviously, these trends are reflected in school populations. Census data from 2000 indicate that the school-aged population is comprised of approximately 1% Indian/Alaskan Native students, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander students, 16% black (non-Hispanic) students, 15% Hispanic students, and 63% white (non-Hispanic) students. As can be seen in Figure 4.1, national trends suggest that this diversity will only increase in the coming years. Therefore, teachers must be aware of diversity in their classrooms and how it may impact student achievement.

Factors Influencing the Achievement of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

There is extensive evidence suggesting that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience poorer educational outcomes than their peers (Bennett et al., 2004; Conchas & Noguera, 2004; Sanders, 2000). Whether examining achievement test scores, grade promotion rates, graduation rates, or other common indicators of school success, CLD students, as a group, tend to perform worse than their peers. The U.S. Department of Education has examined the academic achievement of CLD students with data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The NAEP is a measure of academic achievement given regularly to students in fourth, eighth, and...
twelfth grades in public and private schools throughout the United States. The NAEP assesses several academic areas, including reading, math, science, and writing.

The most recent NAEP reports show that white and Asian/Pacific Islander students score higher, on average, than black, Hispanic, and American Indian students in reading and math in fourth and eighth grades (NAEP, 2007a, 2007b). The same trend was reported for English language learners, who performed worse on average than their peers in reading and math in fourth and eighth grades (NAEP, 2007a, 2007b). Progress in closing the achievement gap between racial/ethnic groups has also been explored with the NAEP because it has been administered several times since 1992. The U.S. Department of Education has reported that the achievement gap between white and black students on the NAEP in reading in fourth grade was significantly smaller than that observed when the test was given in 1992 and 2005 (NAEP, 2007b). However, the white-black achievement gap did not change for students in eighth grade. The gap between white and Hispanic students in fourth and eighth grades also did not change from 1992 or 2005 (NAEP, 2007b). Figure 4.2 shows NAEP reading scores for black, Hispanic, and white children in fourth grade from 1998 to 2007.

Overall, these data indicate that CLD students are struggling in gaining academic skills. Moreover, schools are struggling to provide CLD students with effective instruction to increase their skills. The challenge of uncovering why so many CLD students experience such difficulty in school has been daunting. In fact, it is likely that no one factor can account for why a student or group of students does not perform well in school. The following factors appear to be particularly relevant to the educational success of CLD students.

Socioeconomic Status

On average, children from low SES backgrounds tend to perform poorly on achievement measures. As shown in Figure 4.3, this trend has been noted in the NAEP data. The most recent reports from the U.S. Department of Education show that children eligible to participate in federal free and reduced lunch programs (only children from low-income households qualify) performed worse than their peers in reading and in math in fourth and eighth grade (NAEP, 2007a, 2007b). With the exception of Asian American children, CLD children are represented disproportionately among poor and low-income households. As shown in Figure 4.4, while 18% of children nationwide lived in poverty in 2007, the rates were 10% for white children, 13% for Asian children, 29% for Hispanic children, and 34% for black children (Fass & Cauthen, 2008). Because so many CLD students live in poor or low-income households, poverty is often cited as an explanation for their poor academic achievement and educational outcomes.

Low Teacher Expectations

Several studies have shown that teachers’ expectations of their students were related to student performance and teacher–student interactions in the classroom. Students for whom the teacher held lower expectations were called on in class less often, received less positive feedback from the teacher, and received less direct instruction and interaction with the teacher (Entwisle & Alexander, 1988; Ferguson, 1998; Rist, 2000). This differential
treatment has obvious implications for student’s motivation and behavior in the classroom, both of which are also related to academic achievement.

These low expectations may arise from teachers’ personal biases or prejudices against students from different backgrounds. However, low expectations may also arise from teachers’ assumptions about the impact of certain student characteristics (e.g., behavior, language use, SES) on academic performance. For instance, a teacher might assume that because a student is from a low-income household, he has fewer books at home and is thus at risk for poor reading achievement. Therefore, the teacher places the student in the low-performance group in her classroom, does not present challenging questions to the student in class, explicitly corrects the student’s errors while reading, and teaches less advanced reading skills to the student. Although these behaviors are well intentioned, the teacher’s interactions with the student have now changed the quality of instruction the student has received, which may influence the student’s reading skill as much as the student’s own innate ability. Therefore, teacher expectations are considered to be critical influences on CLD student achievement.

Standardized Test Bias

Considerable research has focused on bias in standardized testing with CLD students, particularly African American children (Jencks & Philips, 1998). As noted above, CLD students tend to perform poorly on such measures. Most tests are now designed to reduce bias between groups. However, their design implies that standardizing administration or scoring will allow one to measure a skill or behavior accurately. Skills and behaviors do not exist apart from contextual and cultural variables, such as prior knowledge,
language style differences, or family and home variables (Forman, Minick, & Stone, 1993; Washington, 2001). Although many standardized tests may be statistically unbiased, their administration and the interpretation of the results may not consider cultural or linguistic differences that CLD students may bring to the task. Therefore, test bias continues to be cited as an explanation of apparent poor academic performance among CLD students.

■ Teacher Quality

In order to function well, schools require many resources, including qualified personnel, adequate financial support, and working facilities. Among schools’ most valuable resources are their teachers. Researchers have found that student achievement is related to teacher experience and knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2000). However, many CLD students attend schools with less knowledgeable and less experienced teachers. For instance, in a study that included school districts in Cleveland, Chicago, and Milwaukee, researchers found that less qualified teachers were more likely to be assigned to schools with a high percentage of minority and poor children (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Others have found that children in high-poverty and high-minority schools are twice as likely to be assigned to less experienced teachers (Mayer, Mullens, & Moore, 2000). Because many CLD students attend high-poverty and high-minority schools with less qualified teachers, teacher quality may partly explain their poor academic performance.

■ Home-School Mismatch

It is widely accepted that the home environment contributes significantly to student achievement in school. For CLD students, considerable inquiry has focused on whether there are significant mismatches between their home and school environments that may also influence achievement. These mismatches are often attributed to a lack of social or cultural capital—the various linguistic and cultural competencies that schools require for educational success. However, these competencies are not explicitly taught in school, and children may or may not acquire these skills at home.

Consider, for instance, children’s storytelling, or narrative, ability. Children’s proficiency with narratives is important for reading comprehension and written composition skills. In school, students typically are taught to use decontextualized language to tell stories independently, by either retelling events that have occurred or relating their stories to other more familiar stories. Conversely, the storytelling traditions in many African American homes include highly contextualized language, joint storytelling with other children, and creative embellishing of events that may or may not have occurred (Vernon-Feagans, Hammer, Miccio, & Manlove, 2002). Schools typically do not place high value in this form of cultural capital (i.e., contextualized storytelling). This mismatch in narrative styles may be reflected in classrooms and on assessments. African American children may be perceived to tell stories less effectively than their peers or they may perform more poorly on assessments that require proficiency with decontextualized language skills. Although these differences in narrative styles may be related to student achievement in school, they do not indicate that African American families place less value on narrative abilities or the importance of decontextualized language for reading success.

Surely, most parents want their children to succeed in school, and this value is likely to be shared between the mainstream culture and CLD families. However, it cannot be assumed that shared values manifest as shared practices. Because differences like these appear to have implications for student achievement, home-school mismatches are often cited as explanations for poor academic performance among CLD students.
Diversity and Special Education

Given the increasing diversity in our society and the complex issues surrounding the academic success of CLD students, teachers must take care when interpreting student performance. Educators must ensure that cultural or linguistic differences are not mistaken for disabilities that affect academic performance. CLD students have been disproportionately placed in special education since its inception. Even after many lawsuits (typically involving African American and Hispanic students) and the passage of legislation designed to guarantee that students are educated and evaluated with culturally fair and nondiscriminatory practices, data from the U.S. Department of Education continues to show that CLD students are misrepresented in special education (Artiles & Trent, 2000; Gollnick & Chin, 2006; Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982; Markowitz, Garcia, & Eichelberger, 1997; National Research Council, 2002).

The percentage of students in special education programs from minority groups is disproportionately high given their percentage in the school-aged (6–21 years old) population. Table 4.1 shows the percentage of students receiving special education services by disability and race/ethnicity in the fall of 2007 (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The distributions are similar to those of previous years. Asian/Pacific Islander students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Black (non-Hispanic)</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White (non-Hispanic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific learning disability</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech/language impairment</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental retardation</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional disturbance</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing impairment</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic impairment</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other health impairments</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual impairment</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>58.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf–blindness</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic brain injury</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development delay</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All disabilities</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>57.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General population (ages 6–21)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

made up 4% of the school-aged population, yet they constituted only 2% of the students receiving special education services. Black students represent 15% of the general school population but are 21% of the students with disabilities. The largest discrepancies were in the categories of mental retardation (32%), emotional disturbance (29%), and developmental delay (23%). The Hispanic student population at large was 19%, whereas 18% were receiving special education services. The greatest discrepancy for white students was found in the category of other health impairments where they represent 61% of the general school-aged population but are 69% of the students in this category. It is also important to note that CLD students, in particular African American, Hispanic, and Native American students, are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs (Hosp & Reschly, 2004; National Research Council, 2002).

This under- and overrepresentation of CLD students in special education programs raises considerable concerns about the denial of access to equal educational opportunity and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, culture, and language. Inappropriate placement in special education programs has significant negative consequences for students’ educational outcomes and, ultimately, their quality of life. When students are pulled out of the general education classroom to receive special services, they miss part of the core curriculum and receive instruction that is qualitatively and quantitatively different from that in the general education classroom. Moreover, if it is determined that the student does have a disability and should receive special education services, educators must ensure that the student is receiving culturally and linguistically appropriate intervention and support. Whether a student does or does not have a disability, receiving instruction that is not commensurate with one’s ability can lead to low academic achievement, low expectations, decreased motivation and involvement in school, increased placement in lower or vocational tracks, and, ultimately, limited postsecondary education and employment opportunities.

As cultural and linguistic diversity increases in the population at large, so too does it increase in the population of individuals with and without disabilities in schools. As such, diversity presents a unique challenge for educators, especially in the areas of assessment, instruction, and socialization. If differences in culture or language are not considered when administering and interpreting assessments or selecting instructional strategies and social activities, then the result may be academic failure, social isolation, inappropriate referral to special education, or inadequate special education services for students who are culturally or linguistically different.

Educators must also be mindful of the families of students diagnosed with disabilities. It is difficult for any family to accept and adjust to having a child with special needs. The family’s attitude toward disabilities and their resultant behavior can be a major factor in the identification of the disorder and the implementation of an intervention program. Families from diverse cultural backgrounds may have beliefs about disabilities that differ significantly from the beliefs of the majority culture. In addition, language differences between the family and school personnel may inhibit the communication of test results and recommendations as well as the expression of parental questions and concerns. Lan-
Language differences often cause problems in the identification of students who are from diverse cultural or linguistic groups. Educators must be sure to involve the parents of CLD students in the referral, identification, and placement processes in a manner that is sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences. See Chapter 15 for additional suggestions on how to involve families in these processes.

Diversity in Learning

One of the most important things to remember about CLD students is that difference does not mean deficient. Human beings are all different. By just looking at families, it is evident that people look different, think and respond differently, and like different things. People everywhere learn differently, process information in different ways, and look to different external cues for understanding the world. By understanding learning styles, educators can become more aware of how they teach. Moreover, being more reflective and aware of how people learn can improve learning and increase the teacher effectiveness for diverse learners.

Learning Styles

A learning style refers to the way people learn new information. It includes how information is processed and how study habits differ. For example, some students prefer to sit in the front of the class and listen intently to everything the teacher is saying; other students prefer it when teachers use graphs or visual representations of the material. The preferences are associated with which senses a learner uses when learning. Scholars have proposed that students use different perceptual strengths when learning (Kolb, 1984). As noted in Table 4.2, these strengths can be auditory (hearing), visual, or kinesthetic (active) in nature. Research on learning styles began to expand in the early 1970s. Today many models and various measures of learning styles exist. It is not clear whether one’s learning style is flexible or fixed. However, many people are aware that they have preferences when it comes to the way they learn and study.

This self-awareness of how one learns is related to the concept of metacognition. Metacognition is awareness about one’s own cognitive system and includes thoughts about what one knows or does not know. This metacognitive awareness operates as a preliminary skill to regulating learning. Metacognition, which essentially means thinking about thinking, involves a self-reflection process that allows individuals to understand more about how their mind works. It sets the framework for students to have more control over their study strategies by being more effective in regulating their behavior. For example, if a student is aware that he retains information best when he sits in the front of the classroom, then

Table 4.2 Different Types of Learning Styles and the Corresponding Student Learning Preferences and Effective Teaching Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Learning Preferences</th>
<th>Teaching Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>Listening, talking</td>
<td>Explain things clearly, give verbal examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Focusing on handouts and illustrations</td>
<td>Use the overhead projector and handouts with charts and graphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active (kinesthetic)</td>
<td>Taking notes and interactive projects</td>
<td>Give hands-on creation assignments, allow the student to interact in different activity centers in the classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the student has the necessary knowledge to actually regulate his behavior and sit in the front of the class. That basic knowledge or awareness of how one learns best is metacognition. Teachers should also be aware that their students may have learning preferences and develop lesson plans and deliver instruction in a way that actively engages a variety of different learning styles or preferences. Examples of this would include learning by doing (kinesthetic learning), taking the time to explain things clearly (auditory learning), and using charts or handouts (visual learning).

A teacher’s understanding that his students may process information differently or may have different strategies for solving problems will allow classroom instruction to more effectively meet the needs of all students. Essentially, by developing this understanding, teachers will begin to learn more about the students in their classrooms. This understanding is critical for developing a relationship with the student that is based on who the student is. Students in our classrooms represent a complex milieu of internal differences and social experiences. By becoming sensitive to the diversity in learning represented among students, teachers can be more effective in generating positive educational outcomes for all students.

Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Scholars have referred to the way culture plays itself out in the classroom as the hidden curriculum (Jay, 2003). The cultural norms that govern classroom interaction are largely based on white or European American middle-class values. Often there is an implicit expectation that all students will use these norms, even though they are not explicitly taught in the classroom. Educators must recognize that CLD students also have cultural norms and values that they bring into the classroom that may conflict with the teacher’s expectations. Teachers are in the perfect position to learn about the culture, norms, and values of their CLD students. By taking an interest in who students are, where they come from, and what their worldview is, teachers can illustrate to them that they care about who they are and not just who they can become.

Attitudes related to power, privilege, and status can make it challenging for some educators to value diversity among their students. For instance, students who may be economically disadvantaged, members of a marginalized racial group, or speak English as a second language are often labeled as at risk, disadvantaged, poor, or underprivileged. Historically, these labels and the perspective associated with them have been referred to as the deficit model (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The deficit model is a perspective that characterizes CLD students with a series of negative attributes (e.g., lazy, illiterate, rebellious, violent, and anti-intellectual). This model gained prominence in social science research in the 1960s and 1970s and became associated with culture of poverty theories that are still present today (Gorski, 2008). More recently, deficit theories have been critiqued for blaming the victim, promoting stereotypes, and ignoring classism and institutional causes for poverty and educational underachievement. Nonetheless, such negative attitudes continue to permeate issues related to the education of CLD students. Instead of focusing on what students cannot do, teachers are encouraged to understand more about their students’ strengths and abilities. However, focusing on what children know requires learning more about their culture and the experiences that they bring into the classroom. Educators can then use this knowledge of students’ background, interests, and experiences to develop culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy is an effective instructional practice and theoretical model that promotes student achievement, supports students’ cultural identity, and helps students to develop the critical perspectives needed to challenge inequities in schools and society (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant pedagogy is a healthy model of education that allows children to utilize their
strengths (e.g., home language skills, personal interests) as the mechanism for overcoming challenges. For example, many students love to listen to music. They learn about their peer culture through music and use it as a lens to understand their world and themselves. A teacher might employ culturally relevant pedagogy by incorporating music into the classroom. This would allow the students to inject an aspect of their developing identity into their classroom experience, and also allow the teacher to use something the students have interest and expertise in to develop knowledge about math, science, and other traditional academic subjects.

There are school districts in the United States in which over seventy different languages and cultures are represented. A single classroom can have ten different cultures and seven different languages represented. It is not realistic to expect teachers to learn the language and everything about the culture of all of their students. Given that every year the student body is constantly changing, it would be virtually impossible to keep up with all of the cultures in some classrooms. What teachers can do is create assignments, lessons, and learning activities that allow the students to share their language and culture with others in the classroom.

Teaching is most effective when the teacher and learner have a healthy relationship. The foundation of a healthy relationship is built as teachers take time to learn about students. Although all educators agree that students need to learn the curriculum, educators can do a much better job of learning about students. By learning about students’ interests, cultures, and experiences, educators will be in a position to develop lesson plans that are exciting, fun, relevant, and most important, highly educational. Allowing students to infuse aspects of their culture and home language in the classroom will contribute to some students feeling more connected and comfortable with their learning process and assignments.

However, it is important to remember not to single out students who speak a different language or have a different culture. Fitting in is important for many young people, and the last thing they want is to feel as if they are different from everyone else. When interacting with CLD students, teachers are encouraged to be aware of and sensitive to the complex process of adjusting to a new culture or environment. That adjustment to a new environment usually happens most easily when individuals are made to feel a part of the group and welcomed based on their commonalities with the group, not their differences. Using shared commonalities to explore our language, cultural, and individual uniqueness is a wonderful way to celebrate and learn about diversity in a more inclusive manner. See Figure 4.5 for a case study of Ms. Thompson’s third-grade classroom. What would you do if Carlos, Rafael, and Kimesha were in your classroom? As a teacher, what kind of individual attention and support would you offer to these students?

Below are some recommendations regarding effective teacher dispositions and practices when working with CLD students:

• Be clear that everyone has cultural biases;
• Be aware of how personal cultural biases may affect your teaching and relationship with students;
• Consider making a home visit to show the student that you are willing to go the extra mile to learn about her;
• Be aware that cultural differences do exist;
• Embrace students’ cultural differences;
• Understand that differences are not deficits;
• Do not automatically attribute a student’s difficulty to upbringing, low income, or environment;
• Take a positive approach and always build on the student’s strengths;
• Do not treat CLD students differently from other students when in a group;
• Use a variety of instructional practices (e.g., cooperative learning, interactive learning, project-based learning); and
• Develop lessons that incorporate the student’s culture in the learning process.

**FIGURE 4.5 A Case Study of a Culturally Diverse Classroom**

Carlos, Rafeal, and Kimesha are all third-grade students in Ms. Thompson’s classroom. Carlos is a first-generation immigrant to the United States from Brazil. His family moved here with him when he was only 6 years old. Neither he nor his family spoke any English when they arrived, and today Carlos is the most proficient English speaker in his family. At home, Carlos’s family only speaks Portuguese. Carlos can understand most of what he hears in English, but he still has a hard time finding words in English when he speaks. Even though Carlos enjoys school, he is very quiet in the classroom and usually only speaks when called upon. The teacher and other students think that Carlos is shy, but at home he is a gregarious and outspoken 9-year-old.

Rafeal is also a first-generation immigrant. His family moved to the United States from Spain when he was 4 years old. Both of his parents are college educated and speak English. Rafael is fluent in both English and Spanish, and he enjoys art and working with his hands. Rafael also enjoys school, but he is a struggling reader. He is only reading on the first-grade level and often has difficulty paying attention during classtime.

Kimesha is an African American girl who was born and raised in the United States. She lives in poverty with both of her parents who are underemployed and struggle to make ends meet. Kimesha is an avid reader and often goes to the library to get books; she is reading on the third-grade level. However, Kimesha is constantly clashing with Ms. Thompson in the classroom. Ms. Thompson has sent Kimesha to the principal’s office on multiple occasions, and Kimesha has been suspended from school for pushing her books on the floor and talking back to the teacher. Even though Ms. Thompson has a class of 24 students who all need encouragement and attention, Carlos, Rafeal, and Kimesha present unique educational and emotional needs typical of today’s students. All three of these students could be referred for special education services. On the surface, Carlos and Rafael could be referred for a special education evaluation for their academic struggles and Kimesha for behavioral problems. However, only one of these children may actually have a disability.
SUMMARY

Our world is remarkably diverse, and this diversity has implications in work, community, and educational contexts. Issues of diversity, difference, and disability can be quite complex and challenging for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and their classroom teachers. The era of the No Child Left Behind legislation and high-stakes testing discussed in Chapter 2 has left many teachers and educational administrators feeling anxious and overwhelmed with the pressure of school accountability. For some, the joy, creativity, and passion that were once part of teaching have been replaced with testing, accountability, and more testing. The added complexity of diversity in today’s schools can make the pressure of delivering an excellent education to students feel overwhelming and arduous for some teachers. Although teaching can be difficult and challenging, it is imperative that teachers find ways to bring wonder, joy, and passion into the classroom. By taking time to connect with and learn about students, teachers have an opportunity to stay connected with the rewards of teaching. These rewards are reciprocal; when the teacher is having fun and enjoying teaching, the students will have fun and enjoy learning.
Classroom Application Activities

1. Define and discuss the differences between the following terms: culture, race, ethnicity, and language.

2. List and discuss two factors that may be relevant to the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

3. Discuss how socioeconomic status is related to the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students.
4. List one disability category in which students in the following racial/ethnic groups are overrepresented and underrepresented. Discuss why students might be over- or underrepresented in that particular disability category.

a. American Indian/Alaska Native
   i. Overrepresented:

   ii. Underrepresented:

b. Asian/Pacific Islander
   i. Overrepresented:

   ii. Underrepresented:

c. Black (non-Hispanic)
   i. Overrepresented:

   ii. Underrepresented:
d. Hispanic
   i. Overrepresented:
   
   ii. Underrepresented:


e. White (non-Hispanic)
   i. Overrepresented:

   ii. Underrepresented:

5. Go to http://www.learning-styles-online.com/inventory/ and take the learning styles inventory to graphically illustrate your learning style.
6. Take some time to engage in some metacognitive self-reflection. Write down five aspects of how your brain works that reflect the way you think. For everything you write, develop a study recommendation that might enhance the way you learn.

7. Complete the following Cultural Artifact Activity (Note: This activity was adapted from Wilkins, R. (2006). Cultural Artifact Activity. Originally developed for the University of Georgia Board of Regents On-Line Resource Repository.)

Description

As a homework assignment, students are instructed to bring an artifact to class that represents their culture. During the next class period, the instructor will first display these artifacts anonymously and ask the students to identify to whom each artifact belongs. Each student will then describe his or her own artifact to the class and explain why this symbolizes his or her culture. The students will engage in a discussion about their personal connection to their own culture and how certain cultural symbols may or may not be related to their concepts of identity.
Suggested Procedures for Instructor

1. **Defining culture.** Engage students in a discussion of the various definitions of culture. Ask them to reflect on their own culture and list general aspects considered when identifying a person's culture. Allow time for students to go beyond the surface and tangible characteristics to more abstract and internal concepts. Also discuss how they believe culture influences their identity.

2. As homework, pass out a lunch-sized brown paper bag to each student and instruct the students to bring in an item, artifact, symbol, etc., that represents the culture with which they most closely identify. The item must fit completely within the paper bag. Tell the students *not* to reveal the contents of their bag when they bring it in.

3. During the next class, students will be asked to identify which item belongs to which student. This should be done with groups of 6 to 10 students. Decide how you want to group the students for the activity and instruct them to place their bags at various locations on the desk or table by group. For example, have the first six students in the class put their bags on one side of the table, the next six in the center, etc. Another separation scheme is to color code the bags by group with small colored dots.

4. Ask the students to gather around the group of bags that includes their own. They can now remove the contents and display each object side by side. Students have only 1 or 2 minutes (depending on the size of the group) to identify which artifact belongs to each student in the group. Have them write their answers down on a piece of paper.

5. After revealing the owners, have each student speak briefly about the object, indicating what it means to them and how it reflects their culture. (For large classes, students can share in groups).
   - Did the cultural artifact you brought to class represent aspects of your personal identity, your socially “assigned” cultural designation (Asian, Muslim, African American), or both?
   - What three cultural aspects would provide the clearest representation of your concept of self in relation to your culture?
   - What level or component of culture is normally used to understand or define a person’s culture in society? in schools?
   - How will you as an educator create multicultural environments that go beyond “heroes and holidays” in your classroom?

*Materials needed:* Pen, paper, and brown lunch-sized paper bags (optional), 5/8 inch round color dots from office supply store.
KH
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Internet Resources

National Association of Multicultural Educators:
http://www.nameorg.org/.

Learning-Styles-Online.com:
http://www.learning-styles-online.com/inventory/.

National Black Association of Speech-Language and Hearing:
http://www.nbaslh.org/.

National Center for Children in Poverty:
http://www.nccp.org/.

U.S. Census Bureau:
http://www.census.gov/.

Culturally Situated Mathematic Examples:

National Association for Latino Arts and Culture:
http://www.nalac.org/.

References


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**Chapter 4**

**Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: Issues in Education**