Valuing and Respecting Diversity  
and  
Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching

This document contains two excerpts from the November 2013 draft of the California English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework.

Valuing and Respecting Diversity  
California’s children and adolescents bring to school an abundance of unique resources, including their primary languages, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, particular learning abilities and disabilities, socio-economic backgrounds, and dispositions toward learning. In order to create optimal learning environments for all students, it is critical that teachers recognize the significance of all of these variables, as well as other aspects of an individual students’ identity or needs. For culturally and linguistically diverse learners in particular, when teachers understand their students’ multilayered cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, as well as their day-to-day realities, and shape instruction that both respectfully acknowledges diversity and instills pride in students because of their diversity, this promotes positive relationships between teachers and students and fosters a positive self-image in students as learners (Gay 2002). For students to “come to understand other perspectives and cultures” (National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 7) as literate individuals, they must learn to value and respect diverse views and experiences.

When teachers and the broader educational community openly recognize and genuinely value students’ home cultures, primary languages, and variations of using English, California’s culturally and linguistically diverse learners, including English learners, are in a better position to thrive socially and academically (De Jong and Harper 2011; García 1999; Lindholm-Leary and Genesee 2010; Moses and Cobb 2001). The culture(s) and language(s) that students bring to school should always be considered resources valid in their own right and also for developing social and academic registers of English. The variety of English that children use with their peers or families is appropriate for those contexts and should not be viewed as “improper English” or wrong. Conveying a message that students’ home languages are inferior to the English privileged in school is damaging to students on many levels. Delpit (2002, 48) asserts, “Since language is one of the most intimate expressions of identity, indeed,
'the skin that we speak,' then to reject a person’s language can only feel as if we are rejecting him.” This message—conscious or unconscious—is unacceptable and contrary to California’s goals for its children and youth.

Whether students are English learners or native English speakers who speak varieties of English (e.g., African-American English) that differ from the types of English privileged in school, the language children use at home and in their communities is appropriate for those contexts and also for engaging in school activities. Students should not be forced to exclusively use academic English in school. Rather, teachers should support students’ understandings of when to use the type of language that is most appropriate for particular situations (Schleppegrell 2004). Being sensitive to the cultural and language resources students bring to school, drawing upon these resources to expand students' abilities to engage in a wider range of contexts, and discussing different ways of using English that are appropriate for different contexts can help build students' awareness of language while also validating and leveraging their cultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences. Beginning at very young ages, children can develop language awareness and learn to shift the way they use language to meet the expectations of different situations and contexts (Christie and Derewianka 2008; Spycher 2009).

All students bring knowledge and experiences to school that have the potential to promote school learning. The cultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences that some children bring to school may not initially be seen as assets, but they can be. For example, the family or community of some students in rural regions may have deep and specialized knowledge of farming practices, cooking, or herbal medicines. In urban settings, some children may have experiences learning technical procedures, such as bicycle or car mechanics or navigating mass transit. These types of experiences and knowledge can be drawn upon to enhance what is happening in the classroom, for example, during science units involving plant biology, ecology, physics, or chemistry. When teachers are aware of their students’ “funds of knowledge,” they can create “zones of possibilities,” in which academic learning is enhanced by the bridging of family and community ways of knowing with the school curriculum (Moll and Gonzalez 1994).
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Teachers can incorporate culturally responsive instruction by building on background knowledge and experiences gained in the home and community to promote the development of academic English, as well as to promote a positive self-image in students and respect for different cultures and languages (Au 2009).

Students with disabilities—a heterogeneous group that includes autism spectrum disorders, physical impairments, and specific learning disabilities (the largest group)—also benefit from learning environments where their teachers take the time to understand the specific nature of individual students' disabilities and value each of their students as learners who can engage in a rich curriculum. Valuing intellectual differences and viewing students from the perspective of their abilities, rather than disabilities, are key. Students who are deaf and whose primary language is ASL, for example, represent a unique culture that views its members not as disabled but linguistically diverse. Appreciating these distinctions and designing environments and instruction that provide multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement can ensure that “first teaching” is appropriately differentiated to meet the needs of all learners.

Learning English as an Additional Language

California’s English learners come to school at different ages and with a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, experiences with formal schooling, proficiencies in their primary language(s) and in English, and socioeconomic statuses, as well as other experiences in the home, school, and community. In addition, California’s English learners come from nations all over the world, and many were born in the United States. All of these factors inform how English learners learn English as an additional language and how teachers design and provide instruction to ensure steady linguistic and academic progress. Regardless of their individual backgrounds and levels of English language proficiency, English learners at all levels of English language proficiency are able to engage in intellectually challenging and content-rich activities, with appropriate support from teachers that addresses their language and academic learning needs. The term “English as an additional language” is used intentionally to signal that an explicit
goal in California is for English learners to “add” English to their linguistic repertoires and maintain and continue to develop proficiency in their primary language(s).

**Stages of English Language Development**

Research has shown that learners of an additional language generally follow a common path to second language development. The CA ELD Standards refer to the stages along this path as Emerging, Expanding, and Bridging. Figure 3.2 summarizes the general progression of English language development as conceptualized by the English Language Development Continuum in the CA ELD Standards.
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Figure 3.2. General Progression in the CA ELD Standards ELD Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Expanding</th>
<th>Bridging</th>
<th>Lifelong Language Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English learners come to school with a wide range of knowledge and competencies in their primary language, which they draw upon to develop English.</td>
<td>English learners at this level typically progress very quickly, learning to use English for immediate needs as well as beginning to understand and use academic vocabulary and other features of academic language.</td>
<td>English learners at this level increase their English knowledge, skills, and abilities in more contexts. They learn to apply a greater variety of academic vocabulary, grammatical structures, and discourse practices in more sophisticated ways, appropriate to their age and grade level.</td>
<td>English learners at this level continue to learn and apply a range of advanced English language knowledge, skills, and abilities in a wide variety of contexts, including comprehension and production of highly complex texts. The “bridge” alluded to is the transition to full engagement in grade-level academic tasks and activities in a variety of content areas without the need for specialized instruction.</td>
<td>Students who have reached full proficiency in the English language, as determined by state and/or local criteria, continue to build increasing breadth, depth, and complexity in comprehending and communicating in English in a wide variety of contexts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The CA ELD Standards Proficiency Level Descriptors (PLDs) provide additional information on these stages. In addition, the full set of PLDs and grade level/span CA ELD Standards can be found at http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/eldstandards.asp (CDE 2012).

However, while guidance on the general stages of English language development are provided, the process of learning English as an additional language is multilayered and complex, and it does not necessarily occur in a linear fashion. It is important to note that an English learner at any given point along his or her trajectory of English learning may exhibit some abilities (e.g., speaking skills) at a higher proficiency.
level, while at the same time exhibiting other abilities (e.g., writing skills) at a lower proficiency level (Gottlieb, 2006). Similarly, a student may understand much more than he or she can say. Additionally, a student may successfully perform a particular skill at a lower English language proficiency level (such as reading and analyzing an informational text) and at the next higher proficiency level need review in the same reading and analysis skills when presented with a new or more complex type of informational text.

**Cross-Language Relationships**

Research has demonstrated that the knowledge, skills, and abilities students have developed in their primary language can “transfer” to their development of English language and literacy. For example, phonological awareness, syntactic awareness, and alphabetic knowledge transfer across languages, which means that English learners who have already learned these skills in their primary languages do not need to relearn them in English, although there are differences in how this transfer works, depending on similarities and differences between the primary language and English. For example, English learners who already know how to blend phonemes in their primary language will be able to transfer this phonological awareness skill to English. English learners who already know how to decode in a language that uses the Latin alphabet (such as Spanish and Romanian) will be able to transfer decoding and writing skills more easily than students who can decode in languages with non-Latin alphabets (such as Arabic, Korean, or Russian) or languages with a symbol-based writing system (such as Chinese).

Just as English learners with primary languages using Latin alphabets do, English learners who can already read proficiently in a non-Latin alphabet primary language (e.g., Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Russian) will still be able to transfer important knowledge about reading (e.g., how to make inferences or summarize text while reading), but they may need targeted instruction in learning the Latin alphabet for English, as compared or contrasted with their native language writing system (e.g., direction of print, symbols representing whole words, syllables or phonemes) and
sentence structure (e.g., subject-verb-object vs. subject-object-verb word order). Properly evaluating an English learner’s primary language and literacy skills and understanding how cross-language transfer works is critical to designing appropriate instructional programs. These programs ensure that no student loses valuable time in relearning what they already know or (conversely) misses out on critical teaching their native English-speaking peers have already received.

Learning English as an additional language for success in school is a complex and “spiraling” process that involves multiple interrelated layers, including meaningful interaction, an intellectually-rich curriculum, attention to language awareness, and appropriate scaffolding based on primary language and English language proficiency, among other factors. The CA ELD Standards provide teachers with concise information on what to expect their English learners to be able to do with and through English as they gain increasing proficiency in English as an additional language. This framework offers guidance on designing and implementing the type of instruction that will ensure English learners’ rapid progression along the ELD Continuum.

**Promoting Bilingualism and Biliteracy**

In recognition of the value of a biliterate and multiliterate citizenry not just for an individual’s benefit but also for the state, California’s “Seal of Biliteracy” is awarded to high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in one or more languages in addition to English. The majority of bilingual students in California are English learners whose primary language is a language other than English and who are also learning English as an additional language. Other bilingual students are native English speakers enrolled in bilingual programs, and students who are proficient in both English and their primary language.

Bilingual students can also be students who are deaf/hard of hearing whose primary language is American Sign Language and the other language is the written language of the hearing community (sometimes more than one language when students are from communities where English is not the dominant language).

Research evidence indicates that bilingual programs where biliteracy is the goal
and where bilingual instruction is sustained promote literacy in English, as well as primary language literacy (August and Shanahan 2006; CDE 2010; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders and Christian 2006; Goldenberg 2008). The enhanced metalinguistic and metacognitive benefits of bilingualism have been demonstrated in multiple studies. These benefits include better working memory, abstract reasoning skills, attentional control, and problem solving skills (Adesope, Lavin, Thompson, and Ungerleider 2010). Other research has shown that an additional benefit of bilingualism is the delay of age-related cognitive decline (Bialystok, Craik, and Freedman 2007).

For all students, bilingualism is a cognitive and linguistic asset. Developing the language used in the home by parents, grandparents, or other relatives also promotes healthy self-image, pride in one’s heritage, and greater connection with one’s community. This cultural awareness and appreciation for diversity is, in fact, critical for all students to develop in order to prepare to be global-minded individuals.

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching

In order to create truly equitable classrooms, schools, and districts—ones that support all students’ achievement of the capacities of literate individuals—educators must continuously strive for social justice, access, and equity. This requires educators to adopt a stance of inquiry toward their practice and to engage in ongoing, collaborative discussions with their colleagues about challenging issues, including race, culture, language, and equity. The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCREST) highlights the importance of creating a shared responsibility for cultural responsiveness:

Culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the belief that we live in a society where specific groups of people are afforded privileges that are not accessible to other groups. By privileging some over others, a class structure is created in which the advantaged have more access to high quality education and later, more job opportunities in high status careers. This leads to socio-economic stratification and the development of majority/minority polarity. We can turn the tide on this institutionalized situation by building systems that are responsive to cultural difference and
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seek to include rather than exclude difference. ... Moreover, culturally responsive educational systems create spaces for teacher reflection, inquiry, and mutual support around issues of cultural differences. (NCCREST 2008, 15)

Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and equity-focused approaches emphasize validating and valuing students’ cultural and linguistic heritage while also ensuring their full development of standard English, and more precisely, academic English. Simply immersing students in standard English and ignoring differences between standard English and the dialects of English that standard English learners use is ineffective because “extensive overlaps in vocabulary, phonology, and grammar can cause speakers to miss subtle but significant differences between their own and the target dialect” (Rickford 1999, 12). Teachers should adopt an “additive” approach toward the culture and language development of their students by enacting the following principles:

- **Self-educate**: Teachers should develop an awareness of and positive disposition toward their students’ cultural and linguistic heritage, their communication styles, and of their students’ dialects of English (LeMoine 1999; McIntyre and Turner 2013; Moll and González 1994).

- **Draw on and value students’ cultural backgrounds**: Teachers should learn about their students’ lives and make connections between their experiences, backgrounds, and interests and content learning (McIntyre and Turner 2013).

- **Address language status**: Teachers should treat all languages and all dialects of English in the classroom as equally valid and valuable and take the stance that multilingualism and dialect variation is natural. In addition, teachers should make transparent for their students, in developmentally appropriate ways, that while standard English is the type of English privileged in school, bilingualism and “bidialecticism,” or proficiency in multiple dialects of English, are highly valued assets (Harris-Wright 1999).
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• **Expand language awareness**: Teachers should develop their students’ understandings of how, why, and when to use different registers and dialects of English to meet the expectations of different contexts and balance activities that develop students’ awareness of English varietal differences and similarities while also acknowledging the need for students to fully develop academic English. When appropriate, teachers should include their students’ primary language or dialect in instruction. Making the hidden curriculum of language visible in respectful and pedagogically sound ways is one way of ensuring the civil rights of linguistically diverse students (Christie 1999; Delpit 1995).

• **Support the development of academic English**: Teachers should focus instruction on intellectually rich and engaging tasks that allow students to use academic English in meaningful ways. Teachers should also make transparent to students how academic English works to make meaning in different disciplines. This includes helping students to develop “register awareness” so that they understand how to meet the language expectations of different contexts (Schleppegrell 2004; Spycher 2013).

• **Promote pride in cultural and linguistic heritage**: Language and culture are inextricably linked, and students’ dispositions toward school learning are affected by the degree to which schools convey that students’ cultural and linguistic heritage are valued. Therefore, teachers should allow—and indeed encourage—their students to use their primary language(s) and dialects when appropriate in the classroom and infuse cultural and linguistic heritage into the curriculum (Gay 2000).
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Works Cited


California Department of Education. 2010. Improving Education for English Learners: Research-Based Approaches. Sacramento: California Department of Education.


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