

2 Culturally Responsive Instruction

English is the most widely learned additional language in the world, but contexts and purposes for learning English vary widely. English may be taught to students as an official national language in a context where many languages are spoken (e.g., South Africa or Nigeria), as an international language to be used as a common language across many cultures (e.g., in Europe, or in a refugee camps), or as a new language in an English-speaking context (e.g., US, Canada, or Australia).

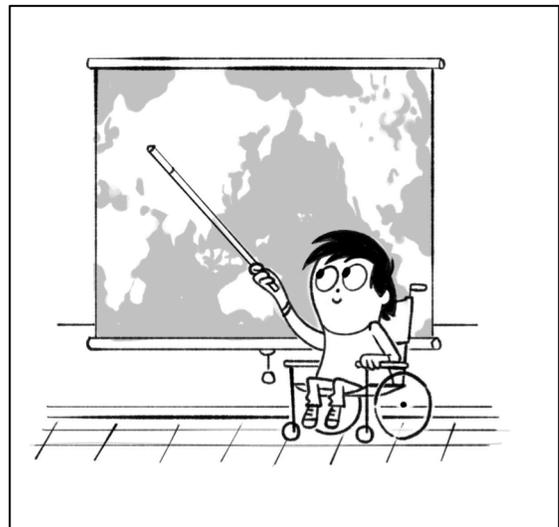
Students may learn English for:

- Internal political reasons – English provides a common means of communication
- Economic reasons – English for international business or trade
- Practical /political reasons – advantages of English for employment or to immigrate to a country where English is spoken
- Intellectual reasons – access to academic texts and the Internet in English
- Historical reasons – English is a legacy of imperialism of an English-speaking country
- Entertainment reasons – English is the language of much popular music and media

Many of these contexts also involve introducing learners to new cultures and classes combining students from multiple cultures. For these reasons, we propose making English culturally responsive to both new cultures and to cultures students bring with them (Nieto, & Bode, 2012). Culturally responsive instruction looks much deeper than just celebrating food, holidays, customs, and clothing of the cultures of learners. It involves family relationships, communication styles, values, and attitudes that learners bring to school. Cultures are the ways, the regularities of particular groups of people, but they are not static – culture is fluid and ever-changing. Teachers of newcomers have the opportunity to set the tone; to start learners on a successful path, and culturally responsive instruction is a key tool.

Culturally responsive instruction includes these five features:

1. **Communication of high expectations for all learners.** Achievement can be undermined by subtle factors: including racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes. It is the responsibility of teachers to be ever striving to address and overcome their own stereotypes in order to build social bonds, high expectations of learning, and students' high expectations of themselves.
2. **Creating an affirming cultural context.** The goal for English learners is often Acculturation - the ability to live in a world viewed through two sets of cultural lenses, not assimilation – trading one culture for another. Teachers have the power to affirm the cultures of learners and the responsibility to learn as much as possible about them.



3. **Culturally responsive instructional practices.** These practices include incorporating different cultural perspectives into the curriculum, seeking out materials that portray the diversity of learners, learning about students' cultures and languages to enhance instruction, actively promoting equity and mutual respect, developing classroom routines that incorporate how students respect one another, get to know one another, and treat one another in the English language classroom culture. Practices should also include ways to motivate all learners to participate, communicate that everyone can learn at a high level, assess students in ways that are valid for their language proficiency and cultures, and challenge learners to strive for excellence.
4. **Becoming cultural mediators.** In order to provide culturally responsive instruction, teachers must seek to become cultural mediators by increasing their own personal knowledge about diversity. This means they might
 - Explore their own personal histories and that of the groups they belong to
 - Believe that difference is the "norm" – that no one group is more competent than any other
 - Learn about the histories of the groups in the classroom
 - Help teachers understand how culture affects the teaching process
 - Help students learn about their own cultures and to appreciate the cultures of others
 - Adapt instructional practices to accommodate the different learning styles and strengths of learners in the classroom
 - Avoid judgments that might negatively impact the achievement gains of students.
5. **Connecting to homes and families.** There is very strong research evidence of the link between parent involvement and learners' success in school (Bennett, 2004) that make it essential for us to seek to connect with our students' families. Yes, we have language barriers, but parents in a new culture, speaking a new language may be hesitant to participate in school events. We must take the initiative in employing strategies for connecting with the home such as:
 - Finding opportunities to talk to parents informally
 - Sending home newsletters with information about school (translated into languages of families)
 - Using home/school folders to facilitate communication
 - Using email and telephone to communicate with families
 - Visiting homes and home communities to learn more about families and their cultures
 - Inviting parents to volunteer in the classrooms
 - Inviting parents to school to showcase student accomplishments, to introduce concepts such as bedtime reading, or to explain the report card
 - Visiting local community centers and neighborhoods to learn more about resources and norms
 - Working to make parent conferences as effective as possible, by
 - Providing translation as feasible
 - organizing work samples
 - having clear notions about what you will communicate
 - monitoring nonverbal signals, which are very powerful – use such techniques as eye contact, nodding while listening, and peer-to-peer seating arrangements
 - listening carefully to parents
 - avoiding placing blame on the family or making judgments
 - conveying an attitude of acceptance, care, and concern.