

# USING CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING TO ENHANCE



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### What is culturally and linguistically responsive teaching?

Geneva Gay, in *Culturally Responsive Teaching – Theory Practice, and Pedagogy* (2004), defines culturally responsive pedagogy as the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches *to* and *through* the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming.

More simply, CLR validates and affirms the home language and culture of students through the use of responsive instructional strategies, which act as bridges or enablers to acceptance, achievement, and empowerment in academic settings and mainstream culture at large.

### Who benefits from CLR?

All students is the simple answer. The more precise question is, “Which students benefit *most* from culturally and linguistically responsive teaching?” A more complex answer delves into who these students are most likely to be. A survey of any recent or past standardized data gives the answer of who is achieving and who is not. In this context, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching would most benefit these students who are termed *underserved* as opposed to *underachieving*.

### What is a Standard English Learner (SEL)?

A Standard English Learner is a student whose home language differs enough from Standard English and Academic English in the following ways – phonologically, morpho-syntactically, syntactically, semantically, pragmatically, and rhetorically. Commonly known linguistically as non-standard languages, African American Vernacular, Chicano English, Hawaiian Pidgin English, and Native American dialects represent the languages of many underserved students.



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Superficially, these students have an apparent proficiency in Standard English and Academic English, but a deep examination of their reading and written skills coupled with the demand of school language posit a different picture. Unfortunately, the students are many times seen as language deficit, not language different, and are skipped over in terms of their linguistic needs.

### **What are the key instructional umbrella strands for culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning?**

#### **1. Standards-Based Teaching Using Culturally Relevant Literature**

- Purposefully utilizing texts that affirm and validate the backgrounds, cultures, languages, and experiences of the students
- Utilization of effective literacy and language strategies made culturally responsive

#### **2. Systematic Teaching of Situational Appropriateness in Language**

- Addressing language variation among SELs (Standard English Learners) and ELs (English Learners)
- Incorporating strategies to support Standard English mastery

#### **3. Building on Cultural Behaviors for a Positive Classroom Community**

- Engaging the students in rigorous activities, which tap into the personal learning styles
- Providing a litany of protocols for discussion and participation that facilitate the validation and affirmation of cultural behaviors in the classroom and the teaching of situational appropriateness

#### **4. Expanding Academic Vocabulary Through Conceptually Coded Words**

- Validating the knowledge base and home vocabulary of students
- Linking cultural concepts to academic words
- Applying understanding of synonyms/antonyms

#### **5. Creating a Validating and Affirming Learning Environment**

- Accepting, affirmative, risk-free classroom environment
- Including in the room environment images that are reflective of students' cultures from the instructional texts and materials to the instructional activities, from the classroom walls, to the classroom library

### **How do I become culturally responsive?**

#### **Four starter steps to becoming culturally and linguistically responsive:**

1. Recognize your student population in terms of who is being underserved, who is not being responded to culturally and/or linguistically.
2. Assess if these students' underachievement is related to their language proficiency and/or lack of responsiveness on the part of the instruction in relation to engagement, motivation, and/or skills development.
3. Using the instructional strands as an umbrella, identify key strategies (labeled in this text as CRI with a special icon) that would be culturally and linguistically responsive and act as bridges to achievement.
4. Infuse the identified strategies into your daily teaching, creating consistent moments for students to connect to what is being taught in the classroom culturally and linguistically.