

## Introspections on in-service Teachers' Intercultural Responsiveness Skills for English Language Learners.

### **Abstract**

This chapter discusses the successes, concerns and challenges faced by in-service teachers in the instruction of English Learners (ELs). The constructs of intercultural responsiveness (IR), cultural competence (CC), linguistic competence (LC) and professional development (PD) are used as conceptual frameworks. The researchers are drawing on data gathered at a statewide conference focused on dual language (DL) education from five focus group interviews and informal conversations with twenty-seven in-service teachers and administrators at all levels of education, and the researchers' field notes. Vignettes of the participants' voices highlight their perspectives and experiences working with ELs. The authors hope that these stories of celebrations and struggles will engage other teachers and administrators to take a deeper look into their personal practices and pedagogies of working with ELs.

### **INTRODUCTION**

*I had a student on my list who had a foreign name and I went to the teacher next door and said "What's this?" She said, "That's one of those ESL students", and I said, "What do I do with her?" She said, "I do not know". This was my first cultural experience at the age of 24, and through the years I've developed as cultural human being that I never had as a child and now I can see the world differently and I can actually make connections with students of different cultures. (ELL teacher, public school)*

As schools are becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, teacher education programs are being challenged to prepare their pre- and in-service teachers in achieving intercultural responsiveness (IR) in their teacher education classrooms (Jones, 2013; Miller & Mikulec, 2014; Porto, 2010). Intercultural Responsiveness has

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been defined by Jones (2013) as multicultural awareness merged with intercultural sensitivity and cultural responsive teaching. Multicultural awareness could be brought through diverse perspectives and emphasized through a transformative curriculum (Banks, 1994). According to Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko and Stuczynski (2011), “Culturally responsive teaching infuses family customs –as well as community culture and expectations-throughout the teaching and learning environment” (p.8). Researchers agree that although the knowledge base is important in being a linguistically and culturally responsive teacher (e.g., Song & Simons, 2014; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), a careful examination of pre- and in-service teachers’ own dispositions, values, understandings, attitudes, and practices using ethical, sociocultural lenses and

sensitivity. This exploration also needs to include contact and collaboration with diverse ethnolinguistic communities would encourage them to develop their linguistic and cultural competence to serve the increasingly diverse learners, especially linguistically diverse learners (García, Arias, Harris- Murri & Serna, 2000; Gay, 2000; Kim & Slapac, 2015; Lee, Cosby, & deBaca, 2007; Slapac & Kim, 2014; Song & Simons, 2014).

McCloskey (2002) estimated that as many as 45% of the nation's teachers currently have ELs in their classrooms. Because of this increase of ELs, in the schools, teachers feel there are more demands placed on them, which can cause negative teachers' attitudes (Reeves, 2006; Walker, Shafer, & Iams, 2004). In fact, a majority of mainstream teachers were not actively interested in having ELs in their classroom (Song, 2016; Walker, et al., 2004). In the United States, children of immigrants make up 25% of our school population (Britz & Batalova, 2013). A great majority of these children are English learners, who come to school needing additional support in order to access grade-level, academic content as well as develop fluency in English. The state of Missouri is no exception. Since 1980, the foreign-born population has increased 172%, with 72,000 of these identifying as Latino/Hispanic (Sandoval, Dorner, & Devonshire, 2014).

Teacher candidates and teachers with English learners (ELs) get to be challenged and to shape their beliefs and attitudes towards ELs when they start their linguistically and culturally responsive teaching practices, being immersed in the cultural complexities of the respective school(s) and classrooms(s). Brisk's (1998) research posits that teachers' attitudes toward ELs and bilingual education are as important as the acquisition of tools and strategies to serve linguistically and culturally diverse (LCD)

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learners. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs are imperative because they can dramatically affect motivation to engage with ELs (Karabenick & Noda, 2004), which can, in turn, impact student achievement and performance. Some universities take a step forward and provide opportunities for international experiences to teacher candidates through field placements abroad. In either situation (national or international placements), pre-service and in-service teachers get to grow personally and professionally, through diverse contextual supports, challenges and transformative learning experiences (Lenski, Crumpler, Stallworth, & Crawford, 2005; Slapac & Navarro, 2013).

There are currently over 30,000 ELs attending rural, suburban, and urban school districts across the state (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014b). Unfortunately, Missouri has not adequately served its growing EL population. In 2014, only one of the schools that received Title III funding to serve EL students made Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO) as required by federal legislation (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014a). Education for ELs in Missouri is almost exclusively English as a Second Language (ESL) coursework that may not include grade-level academic content even though a few schools have adopted dual language education for ELs' academic achievement.

The goal of this book chapter is to explore common successes, concerns and challenges that in-service teachers face when using cultural and linguistic competencies within their diverse classrooms when working with ELs. The participants in this study are in-service teachers and administrators working with ELs in Missouri. The researchers hope that this chapter will encourage educators who are working with ELs

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to use the vignettes and reflection questions in their settings/meetings or collaborative projects, and challenge themselves to discuss different points of view and diverse practices that support ELs and the implementation of IR skills. The researchers conducted focus group interviews during a conference that they (first author and second author) planned as co-investigators of a federal grant, Quality Teachers for English Learners (QTEL). The third author has recently joined our team as a post-doctoral candidate. One of the main foci of the QTEL grant is to provide professional development and mini-conferences on dual language learning through which the participating in-service teachers learn more about ways to develop linguistic and intercultural competencies for the increasing number of ELs.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Intercultural Responsiveness (IR) Skills**

In order to best serve ELs and other diverse learners, teachers must strive to become both linguistically and culturally competent. Researchers argue for the importance of creating culturally inclusive teaching and learning communities where intercultural educators acknowledge their students' differences, and provide accommodations based on their students' needs, values, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and identities. (Díaz--Rico, 2008). In addition, intercultural responsive skills promote mutual respect among students, and supportive environments through high expectations, active student learning, use of critical thinking and critical consciousness, and family and community involvement (e.g., Díaz--Rico, 2008; 2012; Slapac & Kim, 2014; Weinstein, 2003). In general, however, teachers lack of cultural competence (CC) and linguistic competence (LC); they do not understand the benefits

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of valuing linguistic and cultural diversity; and they are not properly prepared to teach academic content to ELs (Fillmore & Snow, 2002; González & Darling-Hammond, 1997). Teachers with ELs need to receive more systematic and intensive preparation and/or professional development on what it means to possess and demonstrate linguistic and cultural competences, which embraces linguistic, pedagogical, and cross-cultural competencies. Measuring linguistic and cultural competences may also provide the data for the teachers to revise their instructional plans to improve their linguistically and culturally responsive teaching strategies (Song & Simons, 2014).

*Cultural Competence.* Cultural competence can be defined as a “set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Saifer et al., 2011, p. 217). In using intercultural skills, educators need to strive for cultural and linguistic competence. One consistent argument that prevailed in the literature regarding cultural competency is the capacity for change and metamorphosis as a result of experience and genuine self-reflection and self-assessment (Fowers & Davidov, 2006; Haddix, 2008; Johnson & Alkins, 2009; Liang & Zhang, 2009). This is echoed by the National Education Association (NEA) which suggests that cultural competency is imperative for all teachers and relates to possessing not only an awareness of personal culture and identity, but also the capacity to learn about students’ native languages and cultures (Why cultural competence?, n.d.). Fowers and Davidov (2006) concur and posited that one must value their own cultural convictions and practices in order to be culturally competent. Self-reflection and ample authentic experience with diverse learners, coupled with self-awareness of one’s beliefs, set the stage for teachers to

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experience success in acquiring cultural competency. Cochran-Smith (2004), Nieto (2000), Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) all emphasized the need for teachers to reflect on their prior experiences, biases and assumptions regarding LCD students and how these can impact their teaching. The acquisition of cultural competence also requires teachers to believe that all students are capable of learning (Liang & Zhang, 2009). In addition, teachers need to be willing to see their students as assets (rather than adopting a deficit perspective), be advocates for their students' expressions of their unique cultures and identities, and find ways to empower their students through a wide range of learning opportunities (e.g., Banks, 2004; Liang & Zhang, 2009; Kim & Slapac, 2015; Mazur & Doran, 2010; Slapac & Kim, 2014).

*Linguistic Competence.* A misleading assumption has existed about linguistic competence (LC). Hymes (1972) described "linguistic competence as just one kind of cultural competence" (cited in Byram, 1997, p. 8). Our focus has been on helping teachers develop CC and LC at the same time, so they can assist ELs in acquiring the dual languages, and English and immersion language, e.g., English after they participate in the Missouri Dual Language Network (MODLAN) program activities.

Lucas and Villegas (2010) designed a framework that "identifies the orientations, knowledge, and skills of linguistically responsive teachers" (LRT) (p. 301). Each of the elements represents a commitment made by teachers to become more aware and considerate of their English language learners and the challenges they face. Lucas and Villegas' (2010) LRT framework includes knowledge of languages, second language acquisition principles, ELs' linguistic and cultural diversity, and sociolinguistic awareness. These are areas to potentially incorporate in the LC framework, but with

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caution. Poyatos (1992) also identified 10 dimensions of communication in which learners may encounter challenges. The first four of Poyatos' 10 dimensions—phonetics, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary—are tied to the linguistic competence of language teachers; the other six dimensions are paralinguistics, kinesics, proxemics, haptics, body-adaptors, which may belong to cultural competence the educators need to know to build inclusive classroom environments.

In order to build the inclusive classroom for ELs, Nguyen and Commins (2014) restructured linguistic competence in terms of 1) beliefs and dispositions, 2) in-depth knowledge, 3) process skills, and 4) application in diverse settings. First, linguistically competent teachers need to examine beliefs, develop dispositions, and understand that bilingualism is a cognitive, social asset for all people that can be developed through schools. They also need to reject an English only orientations and uncritical assimilation into both the language and dominant cultural paradigm. Secondly, linguistically competent teachers also need to be familiar with students' prior literacy and language experiences, and learn the difference between how literacy develops through the primary and additional languages (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Nguyen & Commins, 2014). Thirdly, linguistically competent teachers need to build the instruction based on ELs' first and second languages, create different groupings and activities for language demand, and be responsive to language proficiency levels of students (Song, 2016).

Researchers (e.g., Lucas & Villegas, 2010; Poyatos, 1992; Song & Simons, 2014) seem to agree that in order to become linguistically competent teachers, they need to understand the language systems and compare and contrast the ELs' first and



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second languages in the areas of syntax, phonology, and semantics to diagnose the difficulty ELs have when acquiring the target language. They also have to examine their own disposition towards linguistically diverse students such as cross-cultural norms, family engagement, and native languages in order to prepare the instructional activities to meet the needs of the ELs (Song & Simons, 2014). Even for the monolingual teachers, they do not only need to have cultural competence but also linguistic competence.

*Professional Development.* Another approach in preparing teachers for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners is by engaging them in professional development (Prater & Devereaux, 2009). Such opportunities through various professional development sessions would afford in-service teachers to develop their professional and personal transformations, and become equipped with the tools that may need to accommodate their diverse learners. One of the most frequently reported benefits of PD for working with ELs is the acquisition of strategies, materials and methods to use during instruction (Dantas-Whitney & Waldschmidt, 2009; Gándara, Maxwell-Holly & Driscoll, 2005; Karabenick & Noda, 2004). However, the duration of the PD and lack of cohesion is often a problem in some sessions, resulting in what participants in Gándara, Maxwell-Holly, and Driscoll's (2005) study on teachers in California deemed "one-shot" professional development.

However, of the existing studies conducted on the influence of PD on teachers' attitudes toward ELs (Dantas-Whitney & Waldschmidt, 2009; Gándara, Maxwell-Holly & Driscoll, 2005; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Reeves, 2006), most have revealed little or no transformation of teachers' attitudes or beliefs (Reeves, 2006; Walker, Shafer, & Iiams

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(2004). In addition, courses offered during teacher education programs or professional development sessions do not specifically address how to support English learners (ELs) unless the focus of such programs is Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Teacher educators, Dantas-Whitney and Waldschmidt (2009) coordinated a five year-long professional development project to support ELs in Oregon public schools that involved both preservice and inservice teachers that included TESOL coursework, professional development sessions, reflection and other activities. The goals of the program were for participants to cultivate a culturally responsive pedagogy and increase their critical cultural consciousness. Analysis of the data of two preservice teacher participants, however, revealed that the experience fell short of the expectations of the researchers, resulting in beliefs that “ESOL strategies are good for all students,” (Dantas-Whitney & Waldschmidt, 2009, p. 68) and “superficial acknowledgement of cultural issues” (p. 71). Participants’ reflections also demonstrated “contradictory and incomplete beliefs regarding working with students who are learning English as an additional language” (Dantas-Whitney & Waldschmidt, 2009, p. 73). These data echo the results garnered from Reeves’s (2006) study of secondary teachers’ attitudes of ELs, in which nearly half of the participants were ambivalent regarding receiving professional development.

### **Dual Language Approaches for ELs’ Academic Achievement**

Dual language (DL) approaches are added to the background section because the participants are being trained and/or will be trained to learn DL approaches. Because of the promise of Dual Language (DL) education, Missouri districts want to try this new approach, but new measures are needed to assess its potential and truly understand

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how and when DL programs lead to successful student outcomes. The term Dual Language refers to a variety of educational practices. For the purpose of this chapter, and most broadly in the literature, DL education means the use of two different languages to instruct content materials. Some of the most rigorous and comprehensive evaluations of DL two-way immersion education have been conducted by Kathryn Lindholm-Leary (Lindholm-Leary, 2001, 2005, 2011; Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006; Lindholm-Leary & Howard, 2008).

Bilingual research and theories note that it takes at least seven years to develop academic fluency in two languages (e.g., Alanis, 2000; Cummins, 2005), so longitudinal studies are critical. Moreover, neither state tests nor a significant body of research have measured DL student social/cognitive growth. Through this statewide partnership with university faculty and the local school districts, the teachers will improve their teaching strategies that impact ELs' academic achievement. The prerequisite to the success of dual language approaches is to have access to resources, knowledge, and research about how to create *well-implemented programs, per their specific context* with the support of administrators, mentors, and university experts. The first step before implementing the dual language program is to have dialogue about dual language educators' cultural and linguistic competence, and this study will share our discourse among district administrators, teachers, university faculty, and state representatives.

## **MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER**

### **Context and Participants**

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In November 2015, the researchers invited teachers and administrators from the Midwest area in the United States to attend a two-day mini-conference with sessions that emphasized dual language immersion models, dual language teaching approaches, and supports for ELs and immigrant families. This was the first time the statewide conference was held on a topic of dual language learning to bridge the achievement gap of ELs. The participants who attended this conference were twenty-seven district in-service teachers and administrators from public, charter, language immersion schools (Chinese, French, and Spanish) and dual language immersion in the Midwest area. Among the participants, there were also two university foreign language professors and two PhD candidates, three dual language teachers (K-1), one special education teacher and one literacy coach at the respective schools. All areas of teaching were represented: early childhood, elementary, middle school, and high school.

The researchers were interested in engaging these teachers in conversations that went beyond their experiences implementing second language acquisition strategies, and challenged them to look deeper into their own understandings of cultural and linguistic competencies, including their common success and concerns within their settings. In order to do so, the three teacher educators at a Midwestern university were looking to explore the specific successes, challenges and concerns regarding the development and usage of Intercultural Responsiveness (IR) skills that these conference participants engaged daily with ELs. A secondary purpose of these conversations was to understand the needs of teachers and administrators working with ELs.

This conference was set to establish a context called Missouri Dual Language

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Network (MODLAN) in the state of Missouri, which aims at ELs' academic achievement by utilizing ELs' immersion languages as communication media and/or as resources.

MODLAN highlights that well-implemented Dual Language (DL) programs result in ELs' academic achievement as well as bilingual proficiency, increased cultural sensitivity, effective communication with families, and long-term benefits for ELs and English-speaking students alike (Bialystok, Peets, & Moreno, 2014; Christian, Howard, & Loeb, 2000; Dorner & Layton, 2014; Fortune, 2012; Fortune & Tedick, 2008b; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Palmer, 2007; Tedick, Christian, & Fortune, 2011; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

However, in the past, Missouri school districts have not had the right resources, instructional materials, teacher professional development, or student demographics (ELs from the same language group) to create effective DL programs. This is changing: Missouri districts have approached the state and universities for assistance in developing DL programs to better serve their ELs as well as students from English-speaking homes. To ensure well-implemented programs, however, we must collaborate, to share best practices and develop research-based tools and a longitudinal database, with focus on DL student outcomes in a smaller and "new immigrant" context like Missouri. Most of teachers with ELs in Missouri do not incorporate dual language immersion approaches into teaching linguistically and culturally diverse learners even though they are aware of its significance (Dorner, 2015). Partnering to examine dual language education across this state has never been done before, but it is the crucial next step to ensure ELs' strong academic and social growth for our transnational and global economy.

## **Methodological Procedures**

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The researchers are drawing on data from five focus group interviews, informal conversations with the participants and the researchers' field notes. Each focus group interview was audio-recorded, and lasted approximately one hour during the break session at the conference. There were five to six participants at each of the five tables set up for the focus group interviews. The participants were randomly assigned at tables as the focus was to engage everyone in conversation, while provide the opportunity to share their diverse experiences as working with ELs, and to possibly create future collaborations. The focus groups were conducted by faculty and graduate assistants working in QTEL grant and/or collaborators with the researchers. The focus of the interview questions were related to cultural and linguistic competencies, successful teaching strategies and challenges in implementation of different strategies, opportunities for professional growth in terms of collaboration, professional development and other supports received within their districts. The researchers also engaged in informal follow-up conversations with some of the participants to gain some information and feedback in regards to future planning for such conferences. The researchers used a team approach by individually and collectively examining the data (transcribed focus group interviews and field notes) in order to avoid biases, and for inter-rater reliability. Using the common analytic processes of grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006), the researchers focused on open and axial coding to develop the emergent themes and specific categories with focus on relevant concepts related to our purpose for this book chapter. Then, the researchers engaged in comparing and contrasting the data at multiple levels of analysis across the interview transcripts. In order to keep the names of the participants confidential and to help avoid extraneous biases during analysis, the

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researchers used table numbers rather than pseudonyms for participants during coding.

## **VIGNETTES**

The findings of this study revealed a conscientious effort made by all the participants to use intercultural responsive (IR) skills with focus on creating classroom cultures while being sensitive to the students' backgrounds and needs. While the researchers recognize that these vignettes are just small glimpses into the in-service teachers' classroom practices and environments, they also may provide opportunities for further discussion and analysis for other educators working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. All participants pointed out the growing number of immigrants in the last 10 years, and the continuous need for being proactive in seeking supports and attending such conferences to be able to, in turn, support English learners and their families. The participants confirmed the plethora of cultural diversity in their school districts and respective classrooms that prompted them to connect to other teachers from other districts and seek other supports (e.g., social work, special educators, etc.).

It was interesting to notice the differences among teachers regarding their perspectives on what it means to be a culturally competent educator, in part due to their own experiences working with ELs, their personal backgrounds, and their diverse K-12 areas of teaching (e.g., K-12, and university level). It was also useful for us, as researchers and teacher educators, to have a better understanding of the common classroom practices and challenges, based on what the participants deemed as significant, successful, or challenging on regular basis.

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### **Impactful Implementation of Intercultural Responsiveness (IR)**

Teachers described feeling competent in their approaches by trying to meet the needs of their students, while respecting their values, traditions, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and recognizing the need to learn about them and appreciate them. In doing so, they also create welcoming classroom and school communities, mediating the connections between home, and classroom/school cultures. The classroom/school successful implementation of the IR skills were first mentioned in relation to the importance of developing strong teacher-student relationships and classroom communities in which students' cultures are being recognized and honored.

*I think Culturally Responsive instruction is acknowledging that students are not coming as blank slates; they come with skills that may not be valued in an American school but are valued where they come from, and it is our job to access those and use them to leverage their understanding of the classroom and academic language but not to diminish what they know or already have. They're coming with all these language resources that we don't know and our job is to send the message that they are valuable, their family and experiences are valuable. (T3)*

*To be a cultural responsive teacher is to prepare the instruction as part of the specific culture and making sure that each student has a part in the school. As we mention in the conference this morning we cannot separate our curriculum for where the kids are coming because they are not going to feel they belong to that environment; we need to incorporate these pieces for them to feel a part of that environment. (T4)*



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*Cultural and linguistic competency means to empathize. (T4)*

*I've learned a lot about Arabic and what the students tend to do in English from the Arabic influence, but being culturally competent and responsive, you've got to honor the cultures that are coming from, especially, with the diversity in my classroom, we have set up countries in the world kids they represent, so there is a lot of training and appreciation and tolerance taught in my classroom. (T1)*

Being sensitive, caring and compassionate towards students' journeys and needs was recognized as the strongest component of being an intercultural educator:

*I have a number of students from Iraq we had to educate the staff...if we are having hot dogs let's make sure they are beef hot dogs...when some of the girls didn't shake hands with men we had to say it's not being rude...it's helping others see it is quite normal and not a sign of rudeness. (T4)*

*It's acknowledging their culture and....I have a lot of students they used to come to the classroom and take their socks off...I really didn't know...so I asked; they told me because they lived in the wild in Burma they were not used to wearing socks...it would be cold and snowing and they would wear flip flops. And I have to let other teachers know because I started receiving emails from teachers - "Do they need shoes"? (T4)*

Connecting the content to students' cultural backgrounds and make it relevant was one of the strategies pointed out by some of the teachers. Such strategies often contribute to creating environments that enhance student success and most importantly, contribute to creating a sense of belonging and community. Immigrant students come with diverse

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experiences, and educators need to reach out and spend time to get to know them, their prior educational experiences and other contextual influencing factors. This is also an important piece of building culturally responsive classroom communities with focus on global awareness (Slapac & Kim, 2014).

*I think related to where their background is, not for ELs but any population even some have limited experiences and when teacher asked them to do some reading or writing activity about things that do not know about it, they only need chances to build background. For instance, there is one student who was coming from refugee situation, had limited education and they asked him to write about a rocket ships going to space, he had no background about that at all. So they either need to change what they are asking him to write or they need to provide him with pictures and videos so he would know what he needs to target. Just realizing that and getting them at their level and making sure they understand.*

(T1)

*My connection is with my students, I think that when you have students who are ELL students they look for somebody who feel they understand them, it was going be there for them and may have a safe place for them, and when those connections are made, it is always help students successful on the general classroom. They always know they can come to you, tell you there is a problem, teachers can come to us and solve their problems or help them so as an ELL teacher, I've learned really that I had to have really strong relationship with my students, extremely strong. (T1)*

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*We have new American classrooms which are similar to new-comers classrooms but are specifically for those students go into ESL or beginner-one type of classes. They are in a sheltered program. Our New Americans classes are self-contained like a school within a school and they can transfer into the sheltered program, and at the elementary level they can transfer into the mainstream 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom when they're ready. We have a New Americans teacher who is leading them in a book study on the MALP paradigm ...mutually adapted language practices, a protocol looking at classroom instruction and how to incorporate students' cultures into your classroom. Not just acknowledging their culture but bringing it into instruction. (T4)*

Being interested in students' interests and valuing something they like was recognized as an important factor to creating strong teacher-student relationships and caring, inclusive environments:

*In my class, my students love to dance on "Watch Me Nae Nae". So they did dance all the time, I said what's going on there? They try to teach me how to dance and I started to dance with them and I was so happy. For me, I didn't think about it, but they make a big deal to that you know that they're so happy, their parents so happy and students are so happy. Wow! (T1)*

Some teachers acknowledge the commitment to share their own culturally (and linguistically) diverse backgrounds, values and traditions to help build strong connections with their students:

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*As far as including my culture, I talk about my family, where I live, show pictures. I live in a rural area...we took a field trip, fishing trip to my house so kids got to see...so all year long they heard about it and we got to go.. Part of it is cultural, part is educational background. To understand when you become well educated you can have things you can reach; my house is not a fancy house but they thought I was rich because it was a lot bigger than their house. In the classroom I do hear teachers including their own cultures - posters from their home countries. Most of our kids can tell you where our teachers are from. (T4)*

Linguistic competency was also discussed by the participants. One of the ELL teachers commented on how she connected the content and language objectives to current events for relevancy.

*One of the practices I am using is beginning of class we watch CNN news or current affairs happening in Missouri; then we write. It's one of the hardest skills so we discuss I ask them to write about one event. (T3)*

Other teachers, especially in (dual) language immersion settings, described the importance of encouraging students to continue to speak their own language and reaffirm the richness of it:

*We need to encourage our students to have their own language. We found that some of our kids are ashamed to speak Spanish. And as they get older, they don't want to do it anymore. And we are trying to foster it and encourage it. I know that has just opened my mind on how important it is to be bilingual. I mean, I am not. And I tell the kids that. I mean I am not and you are and you guys need*

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*to be proud. And it made me see that sometimes I am not always the teacher, sometimes they are the teachers. And it just opened up a whole new world for me. (T5)*

Although several specific strategies were depicted by teachers as commonly used (e.g., scaffolding, differentiating instruction, multimodality, providing accommodations based on the students' needs, strengths and interests), the participants stressed on the fact that these strategies are being implemented not only with focus on academic achievement but also with focus on developing a culturally responsive classroom environment.

*We do a lot of partner work. We have an English-dominant and a Spanish-speaking dominant students together. And a lot of my English-dominant students come from a different socio-economic, they come from a higher socio-economic background than the other kids and there are some cultural issues involved in that too. But we have noticed that the dual language kids only play with the dual language kids at recess. They have formed a little community and they are very tight knit. And it's been a neat thing to see, the solidarity. They cheer for each other and they don't compete with each other. I noticed that when one student moves up a level in reading they will cheer for that student and they are so excited. (T5)*

*For the language teaching - I use a lot of body language. I am like very silly. I like movement I like to do faces I like to be like a monkey - so the body language and*

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*the music also - drawing pictures. Yesterday I had the opportunity to use mostly body language and the music, I am first grade teacher is a very good tool. (T4)*

### **Reflective Questions Related to Intercultural Responsiveness:**

- Would you agree with these educators' statements?
- What does being an intercultural responsive educator mean to you?
- What are some strategies that you are using that you consider successful in terms of cultural and linguistic competencies?
- How do you incorporate multicultural awareness and cultural sensitivity towards your students' and families into your classroom?
- How do you create classroom community? Do you incorporate your students' cultures and your own in your teaching practices?
- How do you engage your students in active learning and create environments for success?
- What types of accommodations do you incorporate in your instructional strategies, content and assessment when considering your students individual needs and other impactful factors (e.g., language proficiency, cultural backgrounds and values, students' interests and strengths, etc.)?
- Do you consider your students' and families' experiences, values and attitudes when preparing your instructional materials and academic content? How?
- How important do you think it is to be bilingual?

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- What are some formative assessments that you consider most impactful in engaging students in active learning and critical thinking? How often do you reflect on your cultural and linguistic competencies and how do you reflect?

### **Family Engagement**

Family engagement was viewed as a very significant strategy in shaping culturally responsive classrooms; some mentioned being more successful than others in connecting with families to participate in classroom/school events and celebrations. Encouraging immigrant parents to visit the classroom (open-door policy) to feel welcome and become familiarized with the classroom culture, while describing their own schooling experiences in their home countries was specified as one of the most useful practices by one of the teachers during focus groups:

*I asked them to come during the school day and they came to my room and talked about what their school experience was like and I told them what school experience looks like here at our school and I took them to the classroom to watch what their children are doing and to give them an idea how different our American school experiences because Mexican schools were extremely different. (T1)*

Using families as “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1992) and respecting their cultural backgrounds, traditions and values, helped teachers establish strong family connections and build classroom community. For example, parents were invited as guest speakers and co-teachers to assist the teacher in their children’s learning:

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*I have a group of parents coming in and they realized that I put them to work. I kind to do that at the beginning of the school would be able to come to school and they'd be co-teaching with me and present a lesson or present a country. I used them that way. I think it is work. They loved it too. (T1)*

Others acknowledge that they are still figuring out how to engage families in the classroom activities as rich resources or how to provide supports and assistance for families who went through war, trauma and other significant changes or experiences. Other teachers pointed out the need to find other strategies to connect with families who cannot attend school functions, meetings or celebrations.

*Taco nights are good. It builds community but there's that other step...what do parents know that they can bring to the table? It should not be just the district or department imparting knowledge. We just had a Thanksgiving potluck with our families and talked about dressing for the weather and how to figure out if school is cancelled. But we really missed an opportunity for them to talk about their culture or to show us something or to bring something so we have more of a mutual understanding of each other. We brought them some stuff...a make and take...here's what you can do at home over the holidays to keep literacy going...but there's still that next piece...where they share what they know....and they are part of building knowledge. (T2)*

*We engage families mostly only when food is involved. Parents will make it and the students bring it to class. We also do a fashion show with a luncheon (...) to show different places we were from. Three of the faculty came from other places and we showed national costumes. (T4)*



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### **Reflective Questions Related to Family Engagement:**

- How do you involve your parents in your classroom?
- What roles do you offer the parents to include them in the classroom activities?
- What practices do you use to involve families in schooling?
- What practices do you use to get to know your students and families better?
- What are some of your most successful classroom activities in which you invite parents to contribute to?
- What do you consider as most challenging in connecting with families and community, and how do you overcome these challenges?
- How do you gather feedback from families?
- What else do you think you need to do to engage families in schooling?

### **Challenges Related to the Implementation of Intercultural Responsiveness (IR)**

When prompted to discuss about the challenges experienced in the implementation of IR skills, some participants emphasized the need for teachers to become bilingual to be able to communicate more effectively with their students and have a better understanding of their culture beyond the mainstream culture.

*I think it requires a teacher to have an understanding of the other culture. In our school, some teachers speak only one language. Most of those who speak Spanish speak English reasonably well. I think it is an understanding of kids ....whether you're in a dual language school ....you have to have that cultural and linguistic competency....it takes an understanding of where the kids are in their*

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*individual skills. I think also it takes time, patience; different kids take different amounts of time. (T3)*

Others described the challenges related to the specific teaching skills, in providing active learning experiences, being able to keep students engaged and motivated, especially in upper grade levels. At the university level, making sure to use authentic and relevant materials seem to work much better than the usual readings, and visuals:

*You want to maintain authenticity but at the same time really show the diverse range of people that speak Spanish or that speak these different languages so that the students can maybe see themselves a little bit more in what you are showing. (T4)*

In other cases, the ability to create welcoming classroom environments and connecting to ELs were considered challenging. Researchers like Banks (1994) and Díaz-Rico (2012) pointed out the superficial ways in which most teachers tend to approach culture in the classroom only through “artifacts, celebrations, traits or facts” (Díaz-Rico, 2012, p. 266). It was interesting to notice that some teachers recognized these elements and approaches as successful classroom practices, while others admitted they need to do more to provide “insightful views of cultures and cultural processes and use this understanding to move beyond the superficial” (Díaz-Rico, 2012, p.266). Here is an example where the teacher from the mainstream culture discusses the most popular traditions with her students and how she made the

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assumptions that her students had already acquired the vocabulary and the background knowledge about such popular tradition:

*Since Thanksgiving is coming up, I've been teaching a lot of Thanksgiving vocabulary; well, a lot of students in our school, a lot of Hispanic students don't celebrate Thanksgiving. So it's been very interesting for me to bring my culture in and it's the dominant culture, of course, because we are in the States and Thanksgiving is important to a lot of us, and to bring that to them, it's very interesting so um... it's fun with the little ones; you can do taste testing and you can color pictures and make turkeys you know, bring a lot of that stuff in but it was very surprising to me that I have, that I thought they would have the background knowledge, I thought they would have that vocabulary, they are already five and six, I thought they would have gotten that at home or in preschool and they didn't. They had no clue, so that was, a way to bring my culture. (T1)*

Another kindergarten teacher addressed this issue of discussing about culture by inviting additional guest speakers:

*At my level it's very unfortunately reduced to holidays and I know that when you teach culture that's really want to go beyond that but I teach three year olds so their ability to comprehend culture is limited in that it results in food and celebrating holidays, so we do incorporate holidays from rather different religions, and different backgrounds. At Hanukkah we have a person from the Jewish faith*

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*come in and talk to us about Hanukkah and that celebration so we try to approach culture in a more holistic rather than just French francophone approach. (T2)*

One of the administrators who participated in the focus groups brought into attention a regular issue that teachers need to face in balancing the district demands in terms of testing with the making the curriculum culturally relevant. Other teachers discussed this issue as a constant dilemma that seems to create a disparity in teaching what is meaningful versus teaching to the test.

*Making the projects culturally relevant is something our teachers do - making the students see themselves in the curriculum. One of the things, since I'm not in a classroom, as a department and district is to make the curriculum more culturally relevant. The English Language Arts curriculum has had an over haul in terms of helping teachers identify more culturally relevant pieces....writing samples or model texts...and then our department on top of that goes in and puts linguistic supports and standards and units. If this is a standard for a classroom teacher but you have ELs of all levels here's how you might address it for beginners, intermediate and advanced levels. But I would say challenges are that it's hard to get buy-in from teachers and schools that this is important because you have this pacing guide, this benchmark, you have MAP and all that so I think a lot of principals and teachers know it is important but they have these outside influences that tell them 'this is actually more important'....but it's not necessarily. (T3)*

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A continuous introspection, self-exploration and reflection were viewed by teachers as challenging but extremely valuable habits in becoming an intercultural educator.

*So my goal as a teacher educator is to open my students' eyes to their potential. And really reflect. So I know that as teachers, we encourage our students to be reflective, but you have to look at yourself. Like what I don't know and do I have these preconceived notions about people I don't even know. (T5)*

*I am continually surprised by our students' resilience and flexibility, a lot of the time the circumstances they come here in, and the things they experience here, a lot of them take it in stride, they make it, they manage, they make a life for themselves, I am proud of them, and amazed that they can accomplish those things with all the obstacles. Part of my learning process...I am always learning...new students coming in ...new populations coming in....always having to learn more....now I have to learn about Congolese refugees, what they've been through, what they bring, their expectations, what they struggle with, what they need, so we're always have to adapt and be flexible. Change is your constant. (T4)*

Another issue that was emphasized by teachers was the limited time for collaboration on CLRT practices. Some teachers mentioned that some of the collaboration was being done electronically, while others confirmed that the collaboration was usually done during planning time or during/in preparation for co-teaching and felt that it was working well:

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*Everyone is pulled in different directions, we all wear different hats. It's difficult to find time for collaboration. I'm in a new role at a new school so it's even more difficult for me to kinda get to know how to do that; something we are really trying to push this year is co-teaching; bringing the ELL teacher in with the regular classroom teacher and do a lot of work in the regular classroom which hopefully will take off and work. (T2)*

*The teachers on the seventh grade floor meet every Tuesday and every Wednesday on our planning periods every week. Tuesday we talk about data and curriculum and how to push it so that all the kids are successful and on Wednesdays we talk about some of the behaviors that need to be corrected and how we can move forward. Some of the different problems other teachers are having we can sit around just like this and collaborate on some strategies to help one another out. (T4)*

*We do something like this once a week, and meet with the teachers by grade levels; the principal meets with teachers by grade level too. And this year the Spanish school added five extra professional development, so we all collaborate through all three different schools, so I like this change this year. (T2)*

Professional development seemed to also be an area of need, especially when challenges occur or resources are sought (e.g. partnerships with agencies, special educators, mentorships for beginning teachers etc.).

*It's hard to find a great balance. We have about five district PD days per year and the district of 2000 teachers and between 27,000 students, it's like they never*

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*give everyone what they need in five days for whole year. It is always not having teachers out of the classroom, so it's that balance that's hard to get. (T3)*

### **Reflective Questions Related to Challenges:**

- What assumptions have you made about your students and what surprised you the most? How did you address those erroneous assumptions?
- What challenges have you experienced in implementing linguistically and culturally-responsive classroom practices?
- Do you think you can move beyond foods, rituals and celebrations and explore the knowledge of culture at deeper levels even with younger students?
- How do you overcome your biases and assumptions regarding when working with linguistically and culturally diverse (LCRT) students?
- How do you/do you use self-reflection to improve your teaching practices?
- How often do you engage in collaboration with other practitioners and administrators? What changes would you like to see in your current collaborative actions?
- What do you consider the most challenging in working with linguistically and culturally diverse students (e.g., academic content, creating classroom community, connecting with families, assessment, standards-based curriculum, etc.)?
- What services and supports do you provide for your LCRT students and their families?

### **CHAPTER REVIEW**

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This chapter highlights the successes, challenges and concerns of in-service teachers and administrators working with LCRT students by depicting their stories of success and struggles through several vignettes. The chapter vignettes are based on data analyzed from five focus group interviews, informal conversations and researchers' field notes. The topics discussed are focused, within separate sections, on intercultural responsiveness skills (including cultural and linguistic competency), family engagement and challenges related to the implementation of intercultural responsiveness skills. Each vignette is followed by Reflective Questions that guide the readers to further discuss and share practices on the issues illustrated/commented on in the vignettes. These vignettes could be used as an aid to reflective practice. While the in-service teachers and administrators discussed some particular uses and implementation of IR skills, few findings of the study revealed that creating a positive culturally responsive classroom community is the pivotal factor that could influence ELs' students' academic achievement. The participants shared very similar perspectives regarding the most consistent and impactful culturally relevant practices. The examples offered by in-service teachers and administrators as most significant in creating culturally and linguistically inclusive communities were the following: respecting their students' cultures and backgrounds, learning about their backgrounds and personal lives, strengths, interests and needs to be able to provide accommodations, connecting with and engaging families in classroom and community, and building content based on students' interests. Some of the challenges discussed were related to language proficiency, instructional practices (e.g., creating accommodations), self-reflection and



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collaboration. These types of challenges provided the researchers with the ideas for topics and needs on future conferences and/or professional development.

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## **KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Cultural Competence (CC):** Ability to effectively function in different cultural settings.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT):** Incorporating the cultures, experiences and characteristics of diverse learners into instruction.

**Dual Language (DL):** Instruction in which students are taught content in two languages.

**English Learners (ELs):** Students whose native language is not English.

**Intercultural responsiveness (IR):** Competency that includes multicultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity and culturally responsive teaching.

**Linguistic Competence (LC):** Knowledge of the rules and structure of language.

**Linguistically Responsive Teacher (LRT):** Teachers who possess knowledge of language, principles of second language acquisition, linguistic and cultural diversity of ELs and an awareness of sociolinguistics.

**Missouri Dual Language Network (MODLAN):** organization in the state of Missouri working to incorporate dual language education in schools to increase English Learners' academic achievement.

**Quality Teachers for English Learners (QTEL):** Federal grant awarded to Dr. Kim Song of the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) that provides tuition for graduate and undergraduate students to earn an add-on state endorsement in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).