



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **Using Multilingual, Immigrant, and Refugee Students' Voices to Disrupt Racism in English Language Instruction**

Curriculum Unit 21.02.02  
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### **Background and Rationale**

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#### **Background**

Within the last few years, the demographics of Barnard Environmental Science and Technology School has changed significantly. When I began teaching there four years ago, there was a large Multilingual (ML) population, but not enough to have a full-time ML teacher. The majority of the students who qualified for ML services spoke Spanish. In my first year of teaching at Barnard in 2017, the school began enrolling refugee families from Western Asia, primarily Afghanistan. Between 2017 and 2020 the number of students from Afghanistan rose exponentially, to the point where not only did the school administration make the original ML teacher full-time, but also decided to hire another full-time teacher, which is how I came to have my current job. As of 2021, very close to 50% of the ML students at Barnard speak Pashto, one of the languages of Afghanistan. Spanish is the second most spoken language, followed by Arabic.

I have been looking at the materials that the district has provided as well as what the school might be able to purchase in the future. Most of what I see for Newcomer and refugee students are textbooks explaining how to survive in a traditional American school. There are common phrases, basic English and many smiling faces. These textbooks can be useful, but they oversimplify or do not address the complexities of what it means to be an American, an immigrant or a refugee. They do not address how and why English came to be the language of this country or the racialized structure of U.S. society. They certainly do not touch on the role race (and racism) have in "English as a Second Language" education. By curating resources at various English language levels that positively affirm the identity of multilingual, immigrant, and refugee students, the connection to the content will become more meaningful. Allowing students to have an active role in curating the content and being able to tell their own stories will ensure that the narratives showcase their personal identity and present the message that they would like others to see.

#### **Rationale**

Oftentimes, ML students, especially Newcomers, are seen as being in a deficit because they do not know English or are still learning English. They are excluded from many in-class activities and assignments. I want

to disrupt this assumption about ML students as not being able to understand concepts that may be more complicated or require analysis and higher order thinking skills, like racism and its effects on education. Instead, I want ML students to feel as though they can not only grasp the content, but contribute to a better understanding for everyone through authentic representation and sharing of their experiences, languages, and cultures.

## Language and Race: An Overview of the Research

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Although there is no official language of the United States, most people are educated to believe that standardized English is the language of academia, success, wealth, and value. In school, the dominant message is that there is a “proper” way to speak and write the English language and if you do not conform to that type of English, you will be seen as uneducated and/or unsophisticated, and you will need to change if you want to be seen differently. “Standard English,” like race, is a fabricated concept created to enforce social hierarchies.<sup>1</sup> Those who speak Standard English are awarded the authority and power that is associated with this most widely accepted dialect. Synonymously, this is the dialect used by most White people with formal education who hold positions of authority and power, especially within the education setting.

Makoni & Pennycook say, “the practice of defining languages has had more to do with defining people and creating boundaries and hierarchies than the definition of linguistic facts.”<sup>2</sup> The glorification of Standard English is a fabrication because all languages and dialects are equally capable of communication, intellect and complexity. Linguistically, they all perform the same function. Language and dialects are also frequently changing. Words and phrases fall in and out of usage. To try to enforce a code of communication is not for the sake of homogeneity, but instead a way to influence the attitude of society toward languages and dialects, specifically those which have been categorized as inferior in the hierarchy. This can obviously have an effect on the lived experiences and material realities of different language communities.<sup>3</sup> In this way, language can be thought of as a type of cultural capital within our society. Those who possess this linguistic capital are allowed to exert symbolic power over those who do not speak this “correct” form of English.<sup>4</sup> The intersection between race and linguicism has many social effects. According to Olding, linguicism serves as a less overt way than blatant racism to put people in social hierarchies.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, the association of language and race has been used to uphold White supremacy in this country.

The overvaluation of Standard English stems from racism and the belief within American society that the English language is almost inextricably tied to Whiteness. This glorification of Standard English and native speakers (NS) of English is directly related to the widespread colonialism of the British Empire throughout the world. Because of this, many NS have no real need to learn any other language and, through systems like education, enforce Standard English as the norm. It is important to point out that there are “societal and systemic forces at work in the context of White privilege and power in relation to the English language.”<sup>6</sup> Multilingual individuals who are White are typically given more agency in society than other races, even if English is their native language. This extends to the ability to make mistakes in language and grammar without facing the same judgment of visible-minority peers. For example, an emergent multilingual person who is White may make an error in Standard English and people will perceive them as “still learning” and allow the error to be made. In contrast, a Black person who speaks African American English (AAE), might be seen as uneducated despite the fact they are correctly speaking that language because it is being compared

to Standard English as the “norm”. Seeing languages as variations of Standard English, which has been used as cultural capital for White people, creates judgments based on language that have been used to construct racial hierarchies.

In order to disrupt this social hierarchy with regards to language and dialect it is important that students are aware of the hierarchy in the first place. All languages and dialects should be considered in equal value and importance within society, specifically within a diverse school population. By naming and honoring all languages and dialects and then having thoughtful conversations about how White privilege is upheld using Standard English, students can become more aware of how the hierarchy benefits some and disadvantages others. From a Critical Race Theory perspective, the way to disrupt the conventional, and racist, view of languages in the education system is to examine the differences that exist and how they operate to benefit certain members of society over others.<sup>7</sup> LangCrit, an analytical framework created by Alison Crump, explains that it is necessary to look at how power has come to be clustered around certain linguistic resources in certain spaces and exploring how this shapes what individuals can and cannot do in their everyday lives, what values are attached to how they use language, and what identities are possible as a result.<sup>8</sup>

I believe this is especially important for students who are emergent multilingual to understand. I have had multilingual students ask me why their Black peers speak differently than the ways I teach them to speak English. By being honest and upfront with students, especially White-passing multilingual students, about how language has been used to create societal hierarchy, they will be learning important truths of American culture and they can have an anti-racist lens with regards to how people in the United States communicate with each other. Although Standard English has been used to uphold social hierarchies, learning Standard English does have value and it is important for students to have knowledge of the structure of the language. The goal of this unit is that students would understand that they do not have to lose their home language to gain fluency of Standard English, and that any, and all, languages serve important purposes within society.

## **Identity and Race in Multilingual, Immigrant, and Refugee Students**

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Within recent years many in the United States have become fearful of immigrants, refugees and anyone seeming “other” due to false information and hateful messages being spread through conservative media outlets and the Trump administration. Islamophobia, which was heightened exponentially after 9/11, was reignited when, after one week in office, Trump signed the “Muslim ban,” barring people from seven primarily Muslim countries from coming to the United States. Equating Muslims to extremist terrorists has created a false narrative that many American people believe to be true. Crowds of people chanting “build the wall” were a direct correlation to Trump calling Latin American migrants seeking asylum “illegals”. The fear mongering incited by his administration labeled these refugees as rapists, drug traffickers, and murderers who were invading the United States. Trump’s repeated reference to Covid-19 as the “China virus” spawned a new wave of hate directed at Asians and Asian Americans. After the murder of George Floyd and the protests against police brutality, organizations like Black Lives Matter were demonized causing racists in this country to feel emboldened enough to storm the United States Capitol. These types of harmful narratives have been used throughout its history to oppress non-White races. They are carefully crafted by those in power to uphold systems of White supremacy. For multilingual, immigrant, and refugee youth in middle school, these explicitly negative narratives can have a damaging effect on an already difficult stage of life where identity becomes

increasingly important.

School can be a place where the complexity of students' identities are celebrated; however, teachers must be aware that the present-day education system in the United States is not structured with multilingual, immigrant and refugee students in mind. It is constructed and maintained to disproportionately benefit White, middle to upper class students through processes like standardized testing, a singular focus on academic rigor and measurement, unequitable funding, and overvaluation of Standard English. Although schools are no longer segregated by race, many multilingual, immigrant, and refugee students experience segregation by alienation and isolation which stem from a perception of illegitimacy. Julio Cammarota explains, "National/American identity entails a specific look, certain type of speech, and even a particular geographic orientation. If just one of these qualities is in question, the individual may be placed in an undesirable category and challenged as an American."<sup>9</sup>

Many times, students who are learning English are seen as being at a deficit. The focus is on what they *cannot* do and what they still need to learn. Shifting mindset towards the assets of being multilingual helps students to be empowered and understand that they are gaining knowledge *in addition* to what they already know. This can put them at an advantage over people who can only speak one language. An empowered identity can be transformative in a students' education. Educators have the ability to disrupt these false narratives by constructing environments where students are accepted and seen as valuable members of the school community. Through thoughtful curation of representative texts and materials and using students' knowledge related to their identity and experiences to produce meaningful work teachers can avoid what Adrienne Rich describes in the following quote:

When those who have power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.<sup>10</sup>

## Using Counter-Narratives as Anti-Racist Practice

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Reading and writing personal narratives offers a way to address issues of racism and counter the deficit-identity that White culture, particularly in education, puts on multilingual, immigrant and refugee students. This anti-racist approach to literacy can help students to realize that "as presently conceived, the education system does not serve the interest of minority groups".<sup>11</sup> With that information students will be able to analyze the resources and information being presented to them through curriculum, materials, and instruction and determine if these aspects of education are creating a positive or negative narrative about people of color, multilingual people, immigrants and refugees. They will then be able to counter any of these negative biases that have been used to uphold forms of oppression by crafting their own narratives that reflect their identity and the way they wish to be seen. By sharing counter-narratives, students are able to take back the role of expert, gain power, and have some control over the construction of knowledge in their classroom.<sup>12</sup>

## Instructional Strategy Suggestions for the Lessons and Activities

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Differentiation is key in working with multilingual students. These lessons are intended for students in middle school and can be adapted to better fit the age group of your students by selecting higher or lower-level materials, changing the wording of discussion questions, and providing various types of differentiation tools such as sentence starters, graphic organizers, and word banks. The activities below are organized into three different levels of English language acquisition: beginning, intermediate, and advanced. All levels feature an assignment based on the same content that produces work of equal quality at a student's language proficiency. The purpose of providing different levels is so students can work at a pace and on an assignment that is comfortable to them. You may want students to decide for themselves which level they feel comfortable working at and allow them to move up or down throughout the assignment. Students may not fit into one of these levels neatly; therefore, your creativity in further differentiation may be necessary.

Students who have very little or no English language ability should be presented with materials in their home language when possible. Students of all language abilities can craft a counter-narrative. Counter-narratives can be written, spoken, or represented through art. English language ability should not be a disqualifier for any student. Students with limited English proficiency can work with a peer who also speaks the same home language. They can write in their first language (L1) and then get help translating it into English. This allows students to demonstrate their competency and abilities as they convey their experiences. At the end of this project students will gain vocabulary, build identity, and strengthen their classroom community. This leads to positive identity investment by students, the knowledge that others care about and value their culture, and demonstrates the power of collaboration on student success.<sup>13</sup>

Vocabulary is also provided with three different levels and should build from the previous levels. Each activity is intended to take at least a few days to work through and can be adapted to fit your schedule as needed. The activities focus on the four language domains which are reading, writing, speaking and listening. Throughout the following activities teachers should demonstrate strategies to help students with their English language skills in these four domains, although for the purpose of this unit, specifics are not listed as this will vary from student to student.

## List of Texts and Resources to Use with Students

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The following list of texts and resources can be used for students to observe, analyze and interpret for the subsequent activities. These resources range in text complexity and content. I have tried to include texts that are representative of my school's demographics. There are videos, graphic novels, picture books, informational texts, and novels to choose from.

- *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga
- *When Stars Are Scattered* by Victoria Jamieson
- *The Proudest Blue* by Ibtihaj Muhammad
- *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai
- *Calling the Water Drum* by LaTisha Redding

- *My New Home After Iran* by Heather C. Hudak
- *My Two Blankets* by Irena Kobald and Freya Blackwood
- *My Beautiful Birds* by Suzanne Del Rizzo
- *Four Feet, Two Sandals* by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed
- *The Day War Came* by Nicola Davies
- *Escape from Aleppo* by N. H. Senzai
- *The Night Diary* by Veera Hiranandani
- *12 Immigrants Who Made Sports Great* by Janet Slingerland
- *12 Immigrants Who Made Medicine Great* by Meg Marquardt
- *Illegal* by Eoin Colfer and Andrew Donkin
- *Harbor Me* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *A Place at the Table* by Saadia Faruqi and Laura Shovan
- *Sit* by Deborah Ellis
- *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang
- *My Name Is Not Refugee* by Kate Milner
- *BE*, a digital mini-comic by LindoYes, @lindoyes on Instagram
- To Be Happy | An Immigrant Student’s Tale by KansasPBS on YouTube
- It Wasn’t Easy Growing Up As an Immigrant by storybooth on YouTube
- Lessons from Lucy Laney: African American Vernacular English (AAVE) on YouTube
- Spanglish is a Language Too! | Alondra Posada | TEDxYouth@UrsulineAcademy
- The Benefits of Being Bilingual | Bella Lawson & Jose Sabedra | TEDxKids@ElCajon on YouTube
- African American Vernacular English | Morgan Gill | TEDxYouth@RMSST on YouTube
- 3 ways to speak English | Jamila Lyiscott by TED on YouTube
- ARAB | How You See Me by SoulPancake on YouTube
- ASIAN | How You See Me by SoulPancake on YouTube
- BLACK | How You See Me by SoulPancake on YouTube
- LATINO | How You See Me by SoulPancake on YouTube

## Activity 1: Analyzing Narratives about Multilingual Students in School Texts

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### Overview

The first activity of this unit introduces students to the definition of a narrative and then presents students with the opportunity to explore different examples of narratives about multilingual, immigrant and refugee populations in textbooks, books and other media. Students will use critical thinking skills to analyze the narratives to assess their potential impact on identity. Students will decide if the source demonstrates a positive sense of identity through accurate representations or if it causes harm by presenting biased or inaccurate narratives.

Fictional narratives with multilingual, immigrant, or refugee protagonists can serve an important role in reaching students who may appreciate reading about characters portrayed as having gone through similar experiences and have similar feelings. It can also be used to educate native-born students about what their peers’ lives are like. These positive effects only occur if the portrayals of multilingual people, immigrants, and

refugees are complex, multifaceted and accurate, while simplistic or negative images could potentially cause unwanted friction between students.<sup>14</sup>

For example, in many fiction books about immigration or refugees, children are excited and happy to come to the United States, which might not be the case for all students. For immigrant and refugee students to continually receive the narrative that the only emotions they should experience are happiness and gratitude can cause them to feel as though missing home, wanting to return, or not liking the United States, are flaws or negative feelings that they should not experience. For United States citizens, especially native-born White students, to only see that same narrative about immigrants and refugees being happy about coming to the United States, might cause them to be offended by an immigrant or refugee classmate's lack of enthusiasm because the narratives shown to them create the expectation that all immigrants and refugees are grateful and thrilled to be here. By identifying, analyzing and discussing the effects of narratives, a sense of community can be created where all students are able to express their identity and feelings.

## **Procedure**

To begin, the teacher will curate a list of materials that students will analyze based on their English language proficiency level (see sample list). Students will be given time to look through, read, watch, and spend time thinking about what messages these materials send. They can do this individually or in small groups. Another option is for the teacher to select different pieces to share with the class as a whole group. After this exploratory period, initial observations and reactions will be discussed and recorded on a class document.

Next the teacher will select mentor texts to model identifying the message of a narrative. I have chosen to use the book *Other Words for Home*, by Jasmine Warga, but you can do this with texts of your choice. Once students are able to identify the message the teacher will begin to work through some of the discussion questions listed below. The goal is for students to understand that narratives can be used to help people identify with a person or experience in a text. It can be representative of certain people and can provide positive images to those who read it. Conversely, if the narrative is incorrect, or if too many texts repeat the same narrative, people might generalize or stereotype about different groups of people.

It is important to discuss the ways that narratives have been used uphold White supremacist ideas within the United States. For example, if reading about the Pilgrims, one might get the impression that the Native Americans who lived on the land before they arrived were offering their land freely for the Pilgrims to take because of the way that some texts narrate the story. Over time, hearing this narrative repeatedly, and even creating a holiday to commemorate this story, has whitewashed this part of American history to be a happy period of time full of friendship and community, despite the fact that Indigenous Peoples were displaced, abused, and killed. This happens in relation to the Standard English language as well, as many textbooks show White students in the pictures as the ideal English speaker. The words, phrases, and way of using English in these textbooks does not represent all English speakers and it is important for students to understand that there is a connection between this "valuable" version of English and White culture. It has been used to exclude other races and groups of people from opportunities because it stigmatizes other forms of English like African American English or accented English. Bringing this into class discussions will help students to think critically about future encounters with texts and other media.

Students will then practice the skills they were shown in the previous lessons by selecting a text or media source at their comfort level to make an inference about multilingual people, immigrants or refugees. They can repeat this activity with texts or media sources that feature Standard English as well.

## Possible Discussion Questions

These are some suggested questions that can be posed to students for discussion or writing prompts. The questions encourage students to think about who is writing the text, what message they wanted the reader to receive, and why. By encouraging students to separate the intended message from the message that they actually receive, students will practice critical thinking skills that help them understand that narratives tell stories and that stories have power to affect society, for positive or negative.

- Who is the author of this text? / Who is the creator of this content?
- What narrative do you think the author/creator wanted to share?
- How might the author's/creator's cultural background have affected their narrative?
- What narrative did *you* receive from the text/content?
- Does this narrative match your experience?
- What might you change about the text/content to make it reflective of your experience?
- Does the narrative harm others (ex. multilingual people, immigrants, refugees, People of Color)? In what way?
- If the narrative harms others, how would you counter this narrative?

## Content and Language Objectives:

### Beginning

After watching selected videos or looking through picture books and images in textbooks, students will be able to record observations (verbally or in writing) and use those observations to make an inference about the narrative presented by the authors of those materials about multilingual, immigrant, and refugee students.

After watching selected videos or looking through picture books and images in textbooks, students will be able to record observations (verbally or in writing) and use those observations to make an inference about the narrative presented by those materials about Native Standard English speakers and American citizens.

### Intermediate

After reading picture books and short prose chapter books, students will be able to record observations (verbally and by writing short sentences) and use those observations to make an inference about the narrative presented by the authors of those materials about multilingual, immigrant, and refugee students.

After reading picture books and short prose chapter books, students will be able to record observations (verbally and by writing short sentences) and use those observations to make an inference about the narrative presented by those materials about Native Standard English speakers and American citizens.

### Advanced

After reading informational texts, like news articles, and fiction texts, like chapter books, students will be able to record observations (verbally and by writing short paragraphs) and use those observations to make an inference about the narrative presented by the authors of those materials about multilingual, immigrant, and refugee students.

After reading informational texts, like news articles, and fiction texts, like chapter books, students will be able to record observations (verbally and by writing short paragraphs) and use those observations to make an inference about the narrative presented by those materials about Native Standard English speakers and American citizens.

## Key Vocabulary:

Beginning: see, notice, picture/image

Intermediate: observe/observation, record, multilingual, refugee, immigrant, citizen

Advanced: infer/inference, informational text, article, narrative, native, standard



## Activity 2: Listening to and Discussing Different Versions of Language

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### Overview

The following activity allows students the opportunity to listen to different forms of commonly spoken languages in New Haven and to learn how and why languages change from place to place. This activity will help students to understand how they will create their school language website, which is detailed after the activities in this unit.

### Procedure

Students will watch the videos in the list below and listen to the creators as they walk through versions of Arabic, Spanish, English, and Persian. They will listen for similarities and differences. Students will be encouraged to discuss their observations with their classmates.

### Possible Videos for this Activity

- Persian: Persian Speaking World: Similarities & Differences (کشورهای فارسی زبان) by Bahador Alast on YouTube
- Persian: Similarities Between Pashto and Persian by Bahador Alast on YouTube
- Persian: The Persian Language and What Makes It Fascinating by Langfocus on YouTube
- Arabic: Students Speak Different Arabic Dialects by The Daily Q on YouTube
- Arabic: HOW TO SAY "A LOT" IN 10 DIFFERENT ARAB COUNTRIES! INTRODUCTION TO ARABIC DIALECTS! by LearnArabicwithMaha on YouTube
- Arabic: LEARN ARABIC- 8 DIFFERENT WAYS TO SAY YES! by LearnArabicwithMaha on YouTube
- Arabic and Spanish: How Similar Are Spanish And Arabic? by BuzzFeedVideo on YouTube \*this video has a swear
- Spanish: Spanish Dialects Around The World: How Spanish Varies From Country To Country by Babbel USA on YouTube
- Spanish: SPANISH ACCENTS | Language challenge: accents (Spanish with subtitles) by Pedro Rivas on YouTube
- AAE: 3 ways to speak English | Jamila Lyiscott by TED on YouTube

### Content and Language Objectives

#### Beginning

After watching videos of different versions of various languages, students will be able to respond using yes or no regarding if that is how they use the words that they hear in the video that corresponds to their language. They will also practice saying the word in English.

#### Intermediate

After watching videos of different versions of various languages, students will be able to discuss similarities and differences between the languages and the dialects of various countries, with special attention to their home language.

#### Advanced

After watching videos of different versions of various languages, students will be able to compare and contrast the different dialects and to discuss with classmates the reasons that words may have changed from place to place.

### Key Vocabulary:

Beginning: Language, same, different

Intermediate: countries, versions

Advanced: dialects, regions, accents, standard

## Activity 3: Curating a List of School Texts Students Find Culturally Affirming

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### Overview

In this activity, students will work together to create a list of texts, media and other sources that positively and accurately represent what it means to be multilingual, immigrants and/or refugees. Students will rate or review texts or other sources and explain how the narrative fosters positivity toward multilingual people, immigrants and/or refugees. The purpose of this list is not only to have students practice critical thinking and English language skills, but to be able to produce something valuable for the school community. Once the list is complete it can be shared with teachers, students, and families.

### Procedure

To begin, it would be important to have examples of different types of reviews presented to the students so they have an example they can model their work off of. As a class, or in small groups, highlight different parts of a review. For example, most reviews provide a short summary, an opinion or critique about whatever is being reviewed, positive/negative thoughts, and explanations to accompany those thoughts. These can be used as the parts of a graphic organizer to help students form their reviews. English writing skills can be taught explicitly during the drafting, editing and revising process.

Next, the class should have a discussion about the intentions behind creating this list and how they hope other teachers can use it in their classrooms. From there, students can work together to decide what narratives they want to curate to ensure that multilingual, immigrant and refugee students are portrayed in a way that affirms their identity and helps others know who they are. When it is completed, it would be great to have a physical copy that could be housed in the school library. This list could be used by the school librarian to help order books and create a display so students have access to these peer recommended texts. It would also be beneficial to have the list available online to send to families and community members.

### Content and Language Objectives:

#### Beginning

After watching selected videos or looking through picture books and images in textbooks, students will be able to rate, using a number scale, how culturally responsive and representative the book is of immigrant, refugee, and multilingual students.

#### Intermediate

After reading picture books and short prose chapter books, students will be able to use a graphic organizer to create a book review that details how culturally responsive and representative the book is of immigrant, refugee, and multilingual students.

#### Advanced

After reading informational texts, like news articles, and fiction texts, like chapter books, students will be able to write a book review paragraph about how culturally responsive and representative the book is of immigrant, refugee, and multilingual students.

## Key Vocabulary:

Beginning: rate, scale, describe, accurate

Intermediate: represent, (book) review

Advanced: culturally relevant, paragraph, draft, edit, revise

## Activity 4: Writing Personal Narratives about Being Multilingual

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### Overview

The culminating project of the unit will be an opportunity for students to craft their own personal narrative that represents some part of their identity that they would want others to see. At this point, students will have had examples of positive and negative, accurate and inaccurate, helpful and harmful narratives. They can use these examples to help guide their writing or creating.

After students have drafted, edited, and revised their pieces, it would be a wonderful opportunity to present their work to the school community. This would allow students to feel a sense of pride in their accomplishments and disrupt the idea that these students are at a deficit. One idea would be to use one of the student writing publishing companies, like Student Treasures, to create an anthology of the writing into books available for purchase. Another idea could be to have a night where students read aloud or showcase their work to classmates, family and community members.

### Procedure

Students will work independently on creating their drafts with help from graphic organizers, technology aides, and teacher feedback. Once students have a draft they will share with their peers for feedback and suggestions. They will edit and revise based on that feedback and be able to provide meaningful feedback to others. This will help students to get some different ideas of writing styles that they might want to try or content that they might want to discuss in their narratives. As students work through the editing and revising process, they should be given feedback by the teacher on their English writing skills and vocabulary to ensure they are building their language skills. For students who are not yet able to write in English, they can work on an alternate way to present their personal narratives, as explained in the content and language objectives below.

### Content and Language Objectives:

#### Beginning

Students will be able to create a personal narrative about their identity as being ML, immigrants and/or refugees by either creating artwork or writing in their home language.

#### Intermediate

Students will be able to write a short personal narrative about their identity as being ML, immigrants and/or refugees by using sentence starters, fillable graphic organizers, and other differentiation tools.

#### Advanced

Students will be able to write a personal narrative about their identity as being ML, immigrants and/or refugees.

## Schoolwide Project: Language Learning Website to Disrupt Hierarchies of Language

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Technology serves as an immensely beneficial resource to students who are learning any language. Using accessibility features like speech-to-text, text-to-speech, and online resources like Google Translate have allowed beginner multilingual students to not only gain English language skills, but to be able to participate more comfortably in their classes. In my experience, students learn best when they complete interesting projects and activities that serve a purpose. They also take great pride in being able to share these purposeful projects within the school and community. This led me to the idea of creating a schoolwide language learning website that is run by our middle school students. Allowing students the autonomy to create something that reflects their languages, dialects, and cultures will help to reinforce the idea that all races are equally important and valued within our school community.

Students will use Google Sites to create a simple website that will house a collection of videos to share with the school and community. The first type of video will be short, 1-minute videos, where a word or phrase will be presented in various languages and dialects represented within the school. This was inspired by creators on TikTok who stitch together videos of people from all around the world saying a word or phrase in their respective languages. Within these student-created videos I want to ensure that Standard English is not seen as the goal or “correct” language upon which the other languages and dialects are compared. It will be up to students to decide how to best name and organize the videos to demonstrate equal value and importance. This might look like choosing phrases or expressions from other languages and dialects that might not have direct translations to Standard English. It could look like using another language or dialect first in the title of the video. Ultimately, I would like students to be the ones who make these decisions.

The second type of video would be read alouds in more than one language which can be used in the classroom, or as a resource for students at home. Not every read aloud will use Standard English. Students with accents will not be relegated to reading in their home languages, but will be given the opportunity to read in English so that there is representation of different ways that English can sound and that English speakers can be any race.

An important lesson will take place after students have created a series of videos to share on the site. To begin, students will be invited to share their observations about the different languages they were hearing which will be recorded on chart paper or digitally. Next, students will be asked to participate in a class discussion about times when they saw value attributed to language. The first goal of the discussion is for students to see that there are implications related to these linguistic differences because we live in a society that privileges White people. The second goal of the discussion is that students understand that their way of communicating is just as valid and important as that of any language and that they hold that truth even though society might tell them otherwise. Consequently, students would see other students’ linguistic differences as valid and important ways of communicating and would disrupt the social hierarchy associated with language in their own minds.

Another reason for choosing this project is for our Newcomer and refugee students to have an opportunity to collaborate with their peers in an activity where they will be able to provide their specific, linguistic expertise. Many of our Newcomer and refugee students are hesitant to interact with their peers who are further along in their English language acquisition or outside of their culture. This project will create an opportunity where everyone can contribute equally. In order for the website to be the most interesting and impactful, students

will need to work together and rely on each other for information. Even the students who are newly arrived and in the beginning stages of learning English will be able to contribute to the project as much as students who are native English speakers.

## Book Club

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This is a suggested list of discussion questions or writing prompts to use with the book *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga. This text exemplifies what it means to be a teen English language learner as well as a refugee. The protagonist of the book is a teen girl who lives in Syria with her family. In the beginning of the book, the readers see a teen who loves movies, has friends, and worries about her family, which many teens will relate to. Things become increasingly violent in Syria and it no longer is safe for Jude to live there, so she and her family flee to the United States. While in the United States, Jude grapples with what it means to be a refugee and multilingual. This book can be used to help students generate ideas about their experiences as they relate to the experiences of Jude. They can use these ideas presented in the writing as well as class discussions to help them think about how they want to craft their personal narrative and the message they would like readers or viewers to receive.

- Page 5: How do you see your home country? How is it portrayed in the United States (US)? Why do you think it might be portrayed that way?
- Page 17: How is your view of the US compared to others in your family or your peers?
- Page 19: Has anyone ever mispronounced your name? What did you do?
- Page 29: In the text, people are protesting in Syria because they want more freedom and democracy. Have you heard of protests happening in the US or your home country? Why do you think people protest? Who holds the power in these situations?
- Page 43: Are there any proverbs or sayings in your language or culture?
- Page 47: How did you find out you were coming to the US?
- Page 63: If you practiced English when you lived in your home country how did you feel like you were doing? Is English different in the US compared to what you learned?
- Page 69: How does an American look and sound? Why do you think that?

## Examples of How to Disrupt Racist Practices in Teaching Multilingual Students

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Biased Practice and Consequences

Anti-Racist Practice and Significances

*Assimilation* happens when students work to eliminate any traces of their race or culture and instead adopt that of the dominant culture, in this case, Whiteness. The consequence of this is that students come to understand diversity as an issue that must be overcome in order to fit into American society.

Students may abandon their home culture and language in favor of White American culture and Standard English. This can cause problems of identity, family conflict, and loss of home language skills.

*Lack of differentiation and scaffolding* occurs when students are required to complete the same work and take the same standardized tests as their NS peers without being given appropriate support or scaffolded instruction.

Multilingual students are failed by teachers at a disproportionate rate as many assessments that claim to measure content knowledge are really measures of English language ability, which is inherently racist.<sup>15</sup>

A *colorblind mentality* is when educators adopt and promote the idea that race is not an issue and that all students are the same. They usually do this with good intentions, but the consequences do not match the intent.

Students see themselves as compared to their White peers and their cultural, racial, and linguistic differences are not validated or even acknowledged. This can cause students to feel as though they need to abandon those non-White aspects of themselves to fit this colorblind mentality.

Many teachers adopt *multiculturalism* in lieu of promoting equity or anti-racist teaching. Again, there may not be malicious intent; however, when only certain aspects of a student's racial or cultural background are discussed, it does not address issues of race, language and the effects on identity. Usually, educators focus their multicultural teaching around the positive and performative aspects of different cultures, like holidays, foods, music, and art. They might also designate a period of time to study another culture, for example, Black History Month, Indigenous People's Day, etc.

The issue with this approach is that diversity is highlighted in comparison to the dominant White culture. Therefore, multilingual students might feel as though only certain aspects of their culture will be accepted or that they are being "othered" because aspects of their culture are seen in comparison against the White-dominant "norm".

Giving students *agency* within a classroom helps them to be active participants in their education. Allowing students to co-create, design, and research for the curriculum allows students to be involved and to offer their expertise in different areas. Giving agency to ML students lets them know that their language and cultures are valued in the school community and celebrated. This promotes a strong sense of identity, both linguistically and culturally.

*Differentiation, scaffolding and appropriate support* for ML students allows students to receive instruction in content that is comprehensible to them upon which they can build linguistic and content-specific knowledge. It creates an environment where students can feel successful and comfortable, which will improve confidence in language ability.

Instead of "not seeing race", teachers can *use linguistic and cultural practices of students to create curriculum and drive instruction*. By not only recognizing, but using, the aspects of identity that make multilingual, immigrant and refugee students who they are, students will be invested in learning and feel as though their identity is valued within their classroom. This will create a positive and welcoming environment where students will learn better.

In her rubric for redesigning teacher preparation courses to be transformative, Mae Chaplin suggests using materials that represent "otherness" as it relates to systems of oppression and to present *multiculturalism as a way to enact social change*. She explains that educators can use multiculturalism to be transformative by analyzing the content they are teaching, the texts they are reading and the work they are assigning in a lens that allows students to think critically about social problems and develop ways to solve them. Instead of shying away from issues of race, Chaplin advocates for addressing them head-on to see how systems of oppression, nationalism and the media can work to promote xenophobic beliefs.<sup>16</sup>

In some cases, teachers will not allow students to speak their native languages at school. When *students are penalized for speaking their native language* it sends a message that their language is wrong and not valued within the academic setting. Students might not be able to communicate in English and will therefore face anxiety related to communication if they are never allowed to use their native language.

*Leaving family members out of their child's education because they may not know English proficiently and/or only communicating in times of discipline* sends a message that the family is not valued or are unable to provide for their child's academic needs. It eliminates the potential for important cultural connections and engagement which can help ML students be more successful in the classroom.

In the United States, *the majority of ML teachers are White and speak Standard English*. According to work by Ruecker and Ives, Whiteness has been constructed as a property of native English teachers.<sup>18</sup> White, NS teachers are seen as the ideal candidate to educate students on the English language. However, teacher education research studies have "identified the linguistic and cultural distance between White teachers and their diverse students as one of the main factors for the low academic achievement and high dropout rates of immigrant students".<sup>19</sup>

Students who are able to communicate, read and write in their home language are more likely to be successful students of the English language. Many studies have proven that proficiency in home language contributes to overall academic success.

Teachers who adopt a "both/and", instead of "either/or" mentality, when it comes to ML students will *allow students to communicate, read and write in their home language while at school*. Students will see that they can use both (sometimes more) languages in school and at home. They do not need to see home and school standards and language as separate entities and consequently feel as though they do not belong in either space. Teachers should see being ML as the asset that it is and allow it to happen freely in their classrooms.

"*Funds of knowledge*" is a concept presented by Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez in which educators communicate with families and learn about their culture and home life in order to "select curriculum activities that promote the participation of students in learning, even making them the experts in some situations".<sup>17</sup> Developing strong family engagement helps students to see that their whole self is valued, not just the person they are at school. It helps students to understand that their race, language, culture, and backgrounds are valued and do not need to change in order to fit into the dominant, White culture. Seeing family members as supporters, co-teachers, and collaborators will help create a strong school community.

Ideally, hiring practices in the United States would change to reflect the diversity of English language speakers. *Representation* of how different English language speakers can look and sound would help students to not feel as though they are aspiring to "Whiteness".

White, NS teachers need to make sure that they recognize their privilege and explicitly point out the systemic racism that permeates the study of the English language. They should make sure that they do not present themselves as the goal, and instead work to empower students and celebrate the fact that they are multilingual.

Having teachers or other staff members who can speak other languages is beneficial especially to Newcomer students and their families. It can help make the transition into school less stressful. It also allows students the opportunity to demonstrate content knowledge without having to rely on English language skills to present what they know and understand. It also creates a contact person for family members who might have questions or concerns but does not have the English language ability to express them presently.

Unfortunately, due to lack of training, *many teachers hold low expectations of ML students*. This is especially the case in newly arrived immigrant and refugee students who are at the most basic levels of English. Many teachers see these students as incapable of participating in the classroom setting therefore expectations of what these particular students are able to accomplish are kept at a bare minimum.

ML students should be held to standards that fit with their ability level, and not their English language ability. Teachers can have *high expectations* of ML students, especially when the materials, instruction, and assessments are differentiated and scaffolded to ensure that ML students can exhibit content knowledge without the barrier of being proficient in English.

## Appendix on Implementing District Standards

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The following standards covered in this unit are taken from the Connecticut English Language Proficiency (CELP) standards which are aligned to Connecticut’s Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These standards focus on critical language, knowledge about language, and language skills that students use throughout their education. CELP standards are organized with one main standard which is broken down into five different levels based on English language proficiency. Each level has a descriptor of what the student should be able to accomplish at the end of that level.

CELP.6-8.1. An EL can construct meaning from oral presentations and literary and informational text through grade-appropriate listening, reading, and viewing.

CELP.6-8.2. An EL can participate in grade-appropriate oral and written exchanges of information, ideas, and analyses, responding to peer, audience, or reader comments and questions.

CELP.6-8.3. An EL can speak and write about grade-appropriate complex literary and informational texts and topics.

CELP.6-8.7. An EL can adapt language choices to purpose, task, and audience when speaking and writing.

CELP.6-8.8. An EL can determine the meaning of words and phrases in oral presentations and literary and informational text.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> J. Armstrong & R. Ng, “Deconstructing Race, Deconstructing Racism”, *Situating Race and Racisms in Time, Space, and Theory: Critical Essays for Activists and Scholars*, (2005), quoted in Lisa Olding, “Racism and English Language Learning: Employing an Anti- Racist Approach to English as an Additional Language Education”, *SFU Ed Review* (2016): 3, <https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v9i.310>.

<sup>2</sup> S. Makoni & A. Pennycook, *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages* (Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 2007) 1-41, quoted in Alison Crump, “Introducing LangCrit: Critical Language and Race Theory”, *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* (2014): 4,



<https://doi-org.yale.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/15427587.2014.936243>.

<sup>3</sup> Missy Watson, "Contesting Standardized English: There Are Many Versions of English, yet We Judge People by Their Command of Standardized English. Are We Right to Abet This Standard Language Ideology in Our Classrooms?", *Academe*, vol. 104, no. 3 (May 2018): 37-40. EBSCOhost,search-ebSCOhost-com.yale.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=130033530&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

<sup>4</sup> P. Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1986), 241-258.

<sup>5</sup> Lisa Olding, "Racism and English Language Learning: Employing an Anti- Racist Approach to English as an Additional Language Education", *SFU Ed Review* (2016): 1, <https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v9i.310>. vi Olding. "Racism and English Language," 1.

<sup>6</sup> Olding. "Racism and English Language," 1.

<sup>7</sup> Caitlin L. Ryan & Adrienne D. Dixson, "Rethinking Pedagogy to Re-center Race: Some Reflections," *Language Arts, Review of Research*, vol 84, no. 2 (November 2006): 176.

<sup>8</sup> Alison Crump, "Introducing LangCrit: Critical Language and Race Theory", *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* (2014): 4, <https://doiorg.yale.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/15427587.2014.936243>.

<sup>9</sup> Julio Cammarota, "Challenging Colorblindness in Arizona: Latina/o Students' Counter-Narratives of Race and Racism", *Multicultural Perspectives*. 16:2, (2014) 82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2014.889569>

<sup>10</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Invisibility in Academe", *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: Norton, 1994): 199 xi S. Nombuso Dlamini, *From the other side of the desk: Notes on teaching about race when racialised*. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 5(1), 51-66. **quoted in** Lisa Olding, "Racism and English Language Learning: Employing an Anti- Racist Approach to English as an Additional Language Education", *SFU Ed Review* (2016): 7, <https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v9i.310>.

<sup>11</sup> S. Nombuso Dlamini, *From the Other Side of the Desk: Notes on Teaching about Race When Racialised*. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 5(1), 51-66. **quoted in** Lisa Olding, "Racism and English Language Learning: Employing an Anti- Racist Approach to English as an Additional Language Education", *SFU Ed Review* (2016): 7, <https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v9i.310>.

<sup>12</sup> Olding. "Racism and English Language," 5.

<sup>13</sup> James Cummins, "Beyond Instructional Techniques and Standardized Assessment: Implementing Classroom Interactions that Foster Power, Identity, Imagination and Intellect among Culturally Diverse Students", *Contact*, 28(2), (2003): 21-31 **quoted in** Lisa Olding, "Racism and English Language Learning: Employing an Anti- Racist Approach to English as an Additional Language Education", *SFU Ed Review* (2016): 8, <https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v9i.310>.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Clifford & Maya Kalyanpur, "Immigrant Narratives: Power, Difference, and Representation in Young-Adult Novels with Immigrant Protagonists", *International Journal of Multicultural Education* vol. 13, no. 1 (2011): 2.

<sup>15</sup> Olding. "Racism and English Language," 6. xvi Mae Chaplin (2019) "Reclaiming Multicultural Education: Course Redesign as a Tool for Transformation," *Multicultural Perspectives*, 21:3, 152.

<sup>16</sup> Mae Chaplin (2019) "Reclaiming Multicultural Education: Course Redesign as a Tool for Transformation," *Multicultural Perspectives*, 21:3, 152.

<sup>17</sup> Luis C. Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonzalez. "Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms." *Theory Into Practice* 31, no. 2 (1992): 132-41.

<sup>18</sup> Todd Ruecker and Lindsey Ives. "White Native English Speakers Needed: The Rhetorical Construction of Privilege in Online Teacher Recruitment Spaces." *TESOL Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2015): 733-56. xix Heeok Jeong. "Agency and Pedagogy in Literacy Education: Toward Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy for Immigrant Adolescents." *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* (John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2021) 31 (1): 79-99. doi:10.1075/japc.00058.jeo.

<sup>19</sup> Heeok Jeong. "Agency and Pedagogy in Literacy Education: Toward Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy for Immigrant Adolescents." *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* (John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2021) 31 (1): 79-99. doi:10.1075/japc.00058.jeo.

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