

Why We Wrote This Book

We work with school districts across North America to help teachers and administrators better support their English learners (ELs) and multilingual learners (MLs). One of our many services to districts is providing professional development (PD). Quite often, PD participants would like an assortment of fun activities and strategies to use with MLs in instruction. Some administrators request a one-day or half-day professional development session that will give teachers something to use in class the next day. We completely understand that approach, as we were once classroom teachers ourselves. We are firm believers that a little professional development is better than no professional development, even though we know that a few hours of strategies realistically won't move the needle significantly in terms of making positive changes to support MLs' equity and achievement.

While we recognize the need for effective instructional strategies that are engaging for students, we have also seen the urgent need to examine educators' beliefs about and expectations for MLs. We define MLs as students who speak or are exposed to a language in addition to English and students who may come from cultures that are different from the educators' own. We believe that we—and the educators we collaborate with—must focus on what is happening in the classroom context in which teaching is taking place, as well as expand our lenses to be aware of the larger contexts of school, district, state, and nation. Instructional strategies in and of themselves aren't the magic bullet to ensure MLs receive an equitable education. Through this book, we will take a deeper look at the practice of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as a framework for changing educational outcomes for MLs and the steps needed to develop a culturally responsive climate in which all students' backgrounds, experiences, and cultures are honored and appreciated and diversity is commonly understood to make a school community stronger. It takes a more holistic, sustained approach that includes focusing on the culturally

responsive component to change practices in working with students and their families.

Prior to the publication of this book, our most recent book together was *Unlocking English Learners' Potential: Strategies for Making Content Accessible* (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017). When we sent in the prospectus for that book, our wise editor Dan Alpert read it thoroughly and suggested we add a chapter on culture. In writing that chapter, we recognized that its inclusion was crucial in situating research-based strategies and academic language for ELs within the larger sociocultural context. As we worked with districts across North America in bringing the research and strategies of that book to life, we began noticing that culture was often left out of the equation when it came to teachers, administrators, schools, and districts who voiced a desire to improve equity for MLs. In our work, we would sometimes hear PD participants espouse a deficit perspective of multilingual learners while at the same time expressing the desire to start with a strengths- or assets-based perspective of their MLs. We knew we were ready to write our next book, and when deciding on the topic for this book, the one you're holding right now, we decided there was so much to unpack in that original culture chapter that it warranted its own focus.

With a teacher workforce that is primarily monolingual, female, and white, many MLs do not experience the benefit of teachers who understand and connect to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This book seeks to help bridge that gap by providing educators who may not share the linguistic, cultural, ethnic, or racial makeup of their students an opportunity to reflect on the importance of MLs' culture in teaching and learning. To do so, we guide teachers through recognizing their own culture and its impact on their teaching and interactions with MLs. We are aware that readers of this book will be at various stages in their work for more culturally responsive and equitable schools, and we have written the book with multiple audiences in mind. No matter where you are in your journey, we encourage you to be ready to listen, to take risks, and to sit with the discomfort that this work may bring. The work is ongoing, and there is always more that we can learn.

As two white educators, we know that we also still have much to learn about how to advocate for and improve education for students of color, multilingual learners, and other marginalized student populations that are not receiving equitable education in our nation's schools. In writing this book, we have sought out the perspectives of academics and educators of color to better understand the work that needs to be done yet are keenly aware that we may never fully understand. At the same time, we recognize the scholarship that people of color have contributed to the field all along and honor their work. We look forward to discussing the ideas in this book with other educators, and we know that we will learn much from these future discussions.

We began writing the book in a time in which anti-immigrant sentiment was no longer hidden from view and even became acceptable, embraced, and endorsed in some circles. As we were putting together the final chapters, the world as we knew it seemed to spin further out of control. The COVID-19 pandemic first struck in spring 2020, and the nation's school districts moved to a remote teaching model, in many cases overnight. During this time, we saw existing inequities become more exposed and impact education in ways they had not before. Factors such as families' access to technology and the internet now determined if students could take part in teaching that was suddenly happening online. Due to these inequities, many students were unaccounted for. School districts also faced challenges in effectively shifting to remote learning, resulting in a patchwork quilt of approaches to educating students with varying results. During the same time period, the United States experienced the largest protest movement that our country has witnessed in response to the brutal murder of George Floyd at the hands of a white Minneapolis police officer. The death of George Floyd in May 2020 marked a tipping point in a long list of police violence against Black Americans, including Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Trayvon Martin, Stephon Clark, Philando Castile, Tony McDade, and numerous others.

The inhumane federal anti-immigrant policies that have been enforced in recent years, the inequitable access to learning opportunities that were brought to the surface during distance

learning, and the protests against systemic racism in our country have led to renewed attention to issues of equity. More educators are joining in conversations about what it means to teach and advocate for social justice, anti-racism, and equity. We acknowledge the work that has been done on these issues for many years and are cautiously optimistic that the events that took place in spring 2020 are ripping off the Band-Aid and inviting even more voices into these conversations. It can be challenging to understand what these theoretical concepts look like in practice in schools and classrooms. Keeping in mind the work that has been done in the past, with this book we have attempted to make these abstract ideas even more concrete, actionable, and relevant to our current reality. However, we recognize that there may be some who say we haven't gone far enough. We agree this is only a first step as we add to the body of work, and this book does not contain all the answers. However, we are committed to learning more about how to better support MLs with your help. In order to start our work, we need to allow ourselves to be vulnerable and begin with humility.

As educators, we can no longer deny the responsibility that we have in engaging in equity and anti-racism work. At the same time, it can be valuable to recognize the joys that come with this challenging task. Your teaching will be enriched when you begin from a strengths- or assets-based perspective of MLs and create a space for the multifaceted experiences of language, culture, and life that they bring with them. As you develop your advocacy and allyship, you will notice your ability to spot inequities, and your strength to speak out against these inequities will grow. Last but certainly not least, your students will thrive when your local classrooms, schools, families, and communities collaborate to recognize MLs' academic and social-emotional learning strengths and meet their needs.