

Preface

We wrote this book to address a longstanding and growing need. Many students have reading difficulties, and, among these, students with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds are a disproportionate group. Teaching foundational literacy skills is necessary to impart to these students that which they missed in the early grades that is necessary to lifelong, literary learning and success. By combining best practices supported by research with instruction that is culturally responsive, we believe teachers and other professionals will improve reading outcomes for students.

Recent advances in research and practice pertaining to literacy acquisition skills and the performance of students on national assessments, combined with federal policy mandates (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEIA]; 2004; No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB]; 2001), have stimulated interest in providing intensive intervention services to students at risk of persistent academic failure. In today's technologically driven, knowledge-based culture, young people need to be expert readers, writers, and thinkers to contend, compete, and succeed in the global economy. Moreover, persistent low national and international literacy standings substantiate that an investment in the education of literacy instruction is a national imperative (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004).

A substantial body of evidence has pointed to five critical areas—phonemic awareness, phonics/decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—as essential components of reading instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). For students who struggle with reading, some or even all of these curricular elements are addressed through systematic and explicit instruction. A 7-year-old or a 15-year-old student who cannot decode words rapidly enough to allow for text comprehension requires instruction in decoding and word attack strategies, along with continuous practice reading connected text. Struggling readers need increased instructional time and scientifically validated methods if they are to close the achievement gap and become proficient.

Diverse students from CLD backgrounds who do not possess the foundational reading skills needed to comprehend written language often score poorly on literacy assessments. In addition to students from CLD backgrounds, poorly performing readers include students identified with language-based learning disabilities, English-language learners, as well as other underachieving or “at-risk” students who may simply have never received appropriate reading instruction. All of these students require effective,

research-based interventions provided in culturally responsive ways that put them on the trajectory to developing the higher-level literacy skills needed to succeed in an information-based society (McCollin & O'Shea, 2005).

Reading scores from the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) verify the prevalence of severe reading problems in older students, especially those from CLD backgrounds. Results indicate that 27 percent of eighth graders read at “below basic” levels. This means that over 1 out of every 4 eighth graders tested could not demonstrate a “literal understanding of what they read.” For many students from CLD backgrounds, the situation is even graver. Consider that while 18 percent of white eighth graders scored below basic, an alarming 48 percent of African Americans, 43 percent of Hispanics, and 41 percent of American Indians scored at that level—revealing significant reading achievement deficits among minority students (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). These students are reading considerably below grade level and are far from meeting the proficiency requirements mandated by federal legislation like NCLB. In the face of these widespread reading problems, experts in the field continuously have called for a more informed approach to reading instruction.

Culturally responsive instruction connects students' backgrounds, interests, and experiences to the standards-based curriculum. Culturally responsive instruction is responsive to students of CLD backgrounds both in content and in process. Learning materials take advantage of multicultural literature, themes, and topics. This helps to ensure that students see themselves and their families reflected in the classroom environment. Additionally, instructional practices themselves can be culturally responsive and reflect what we know about the learning preferences, familiar speech patterns, and way of life of diverse groups. Culturally responsive professionals create classroom contexts that reflect cultural values, such as interdependence and communalism, through cooperative learning activities and peer-to-peer interaction.

Research has demonstrated that small-group strategies for instruction, along with a schoolwide climate of acceptance and respect for diversity, more closely match the natural learning patterns that tend to occur in culturally diverse communities. Culturally responsive instruction helps students connect their own cultural knowledge and language experiences to the language and literacy tasks required of them in school. Students are asked to bring the strategic thinking and competence they have in areas outside of school, or what has been called their cultural “funds of knowledge,” to academic tasks. For example, families of bilingual young people often select them to carry out the hard work of interpreting and translating to mediate communication with the outside world—between minority and majority communities. The experiences of these young interpreters and the skills they develop to fulfill this role can be utilized to support classroom learning.

ABOUT OUR BOOK ■

Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction is devoted to content and procedures of culturally responsive literacy instruction, relevant culturally responsive research, and key players involved in literacy instruction to

students from CLD backgrounds. *Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction* aims to help professionals support the growing number of students from CLD backgrounds. It gives practical advice to professionals. We provide a detailed, comprehensive, and practical treatment of *culturally responsive literacy instruction*. We discuss and illustrate a range of interventions, which support the five critical areas of reading instruction. In particular, we explore classroom contexts and learning strategies that are likely to be effective for students from CLD backgrounds at all grade levels, from primary grades through high school.

We begin the book with an introductory chapter framing the importance of culturally responsive instruction and setting the stage for the practical chapters that follow; here we describe how to teach critical literacy skills to students with diverse backgrounds. In Chapter 2, we address phonological processing and its relation to learning to read. Chapter 3 is about teaching skills that are fundamental to sounding out and recognizing words (i.e., decoding and structural analysis). We focus on fluency in Chapter 4, vocabulary in Chapter 5, and comprehension in Chapter 6. Each of these content chapters begins by introducing a student at risk of continued school failure and ends with a summary relating key content to the student's classroom experiences. Within each of these chapters, we discuss the importance and empirical base for the key literacy skill and describe ways to integrate culturally responsive activities into elementary, middle, and high school classrooms. We end with a chapter reframing the importance of focused instruction to meet the needs of students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Teaching is a collaborative process, and this book is a collaborative effort, with assistance from content experts including Jeff Bakken, Gwendolyn Cartledge, Renee Hawkins, Jodi Katsafanas, Kelly Lake, Michelle McCollin, Shobana Musti-Rao, Ellissa Brooks Nelson, Darren Smith, and Cheryl Utley. These contributing colleagues all have extensive experience with cultural and linguistic diversity, reading, and special education that has greatly informed the content of our book.

■ MOVING ON

Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction is a resource for a variety of professionals, including those established in their careers and those preparing for new careers. General educators, special educators, school administrators, related service professionals, and teacher assistants will benefit from the concepts presented. For professionals in preparation, we believe *Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction* will be an enlightening supplementary text in upper-level undergraduate- and graduate-level methods courses at colleges and universities. The text puts a broad emphasis on the various levels of general education (i.e., elementary, middle grades, and high school). We hope professionals in school administration programs as well as those taking courses in programs for related disciplines that serve diverse students, such as reading, school counseling, school psychology, social work, physical and occupational therapy, speech and hearing, medicine,

and physical education, will also benefit from our book. Finally, *Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction* should be helpful in community college programs where teacher assistants are prepared for careers in education.

Our book highlights effective practices to help professionals plan, implement, manage, and evaluate instruction for students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It will be useful for practitioners who directly use scientifically based literacy practices in classrooms with diverse groups of students. The book, too, is an appropriate guide for professional development workshops intended to increase the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers working with problem readers, including students from CLD backgrounds, readers for whom English is not their primary language, readers with learning disabilities, and readers never provided appropriate literacy opportunities. We hope you enjoy our book.

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